DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 295 733 PS 017 382

AUTHOR Sheinberg, Randy; And Others
TITLE Report on a National Study of Parental Leaves.
INSTITUTION Catalyst, New York, N. Y.
SPONS AGENCY Kellogg Foundation, Battle Creek, Mich.; Revlon Foundation, Inc., New York, NY.
PUB DATE 86
NOTE 79p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Business Administration; *Employer Attitudes; *Fringe Benefits; National Surveys; *Policy Formation; Tables (Data)
IDENTIFIERS *Corporate Policy; *Parental Leave; Policy Implementation; Policy Research

ABSTRACT

Detailed are the research findings of a national study of parental leaves. Basic objectives of the study were to: (1) collect data that would provide a picture of current leave policies, practices, and attitudes at some of the nation's largest companies; (2) discover how policy translated into practice by gathering information about the experiences and attitudes of individual leave-takers; (3) provide a source of information for policy planners to use in evaluating, developing, and implementing policies; and (4) investigate and address barriers to changes in corporate policy. The survey included four components: (1) a survey of the nation's top corporations; (2) group interviews with employees which explored their responses to, and experiences with, company policy; (3) interviews with human resources personnel; and (4) a review of the literature on the subject. Findings are discussed in terms of corporate policy, translation of policy into practice, corporate attitudes and evolving policy, and policy recommendations designed to enable an employer to strike an effective balance between the priorities of a company and those of its employees. (RH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

catalyst

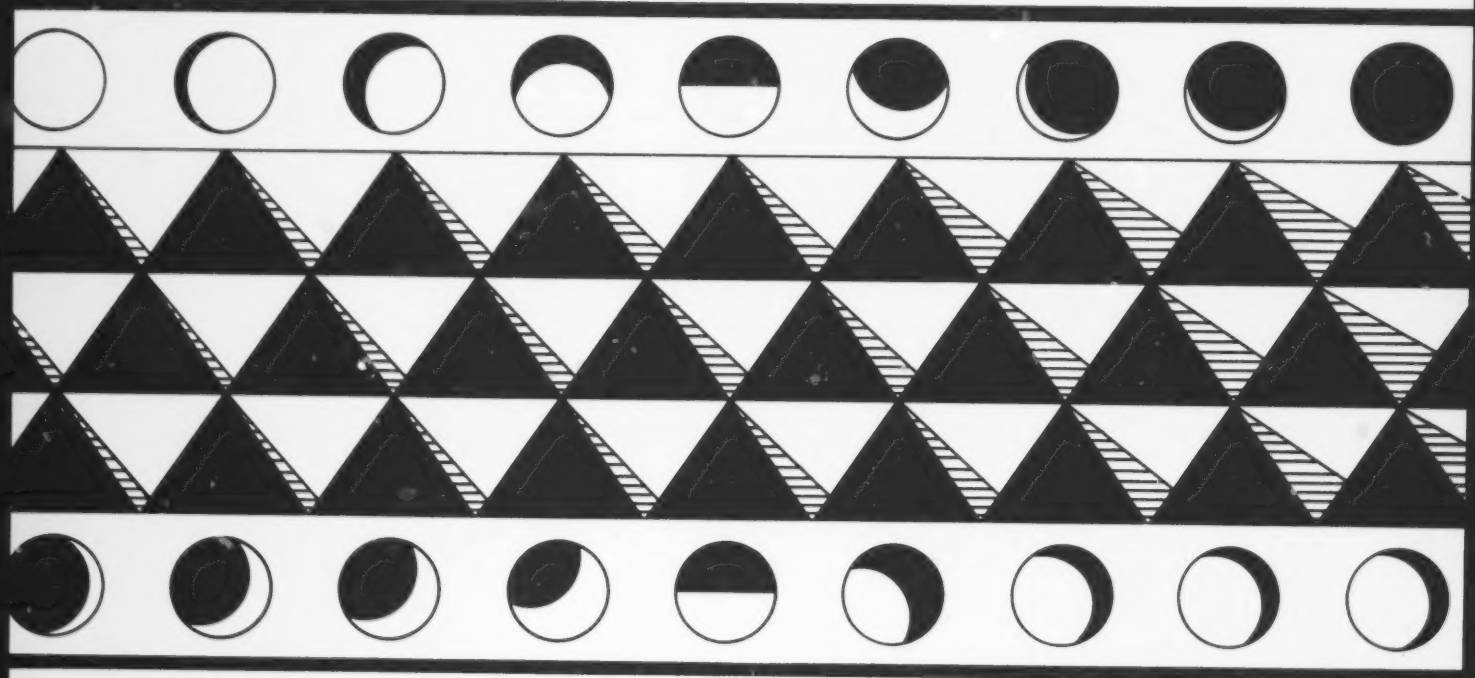
ED295733

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☒ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.



Report on a National Study of Parental Leaves

PS 017382

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Catalyst/
Martha Hill
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

By the staff of Catalyst

This study and report were funded by the Revlon Foundation, Inc.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

REPORT ON A NATIONAL STUDY OF PARENTAL LEAVES

By the staff of Catalyst

Catalyst works with corporations to develop the leadership capabilities of women. We assist policy planners in evolving options to help employees successfully combine career and family. A responsive parental leave policy and a supportive working environment can increase productivity while allowing women to freely choose and attain individual career goals.

Copyright 1986 by Catalyst. Please note: Permission must be obtained from Catalyst before any part of this publication may be reprinted, quoted, or transmitted in any form. For information, contact Catalyst, 250 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10003, (212) 777-8900.

Board of Directors

Charles W. Parry, Chairman
Chairman and CEO,
Aluminum Company of America

Christine Beshar, Secretary
Partner,
Cravath, Swaine & Moore

Roger F. Murray, Treasurer
S. Sloan Colt Professor Emeritus
of Banking and Finance,
Columbia University

The Honorable
Lucy Wilson Benson
Former Under Secretary of State
Consultant

John H. Bryan, Jr.
Chairman and CEO,
Sara Lee Corporation

Harold Burson
Chairman,
Burson-Marsteller

Albert V. Casey
Retired Chairman and CEO,
AMR Corporation/American Airlines

Jane Evans
President and CEO,
Monet Jewelers,
Division of Crystal Brands, Inc.

Philip M. Hawley
Chairman and CEO,
Carter Hawley Hale Stores Inc.

Richard E. Heckert
Deputy Chairman,
E.I. du Pont de Nemours & Company

Hartzel Z. Lebed
President,
CIGNA Corporation

Arthur Levitt, Jr.
Chairman,
American Stock Exchange

Sandra Meyer
Executive Director,
Russell Reynolds Associates

David Moxley
Managing Director,
Touche Ross International

Eleanor Holmes Norton
Professor of Law,
Georgetown University Law Center

Norma T. Pace
Senior Vice President,
American Paper Institute

John R. Petty
Chairman,
Marine Midland Bank N.A.

Harold Proshansky
President,
CUNY
Graduate School

Lewis H. Young
Former Editor-in-Chief,
Business Week

Shirley Young
President,
Grey Strategic Marketing Inc.,
Subsidiary of Grey Advertising Inc.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The staff of Catalyst conceived and executed the research, writing and editing of this report. Phyllis Silverman, Ph. D., Vice President of Career and Family Programs, designed and directed the project with the able assistance of Patricia Nolan whose expertise was critical during the initial stages of the study. Randy Sheinberg, Annette Rotter and Maureen Zent researched and wrote the report and also the Corporate Guide to Parental Leaves. Production and editorial staff, under the guidance of Arlene Johnson and Patricia Nietsch, included Margaret Meiers, Lisa Hicks, Jean Zimmerman and Karen White. The ongoing support of Bruntee Barron, Sharmane Davis, Donna Englund, Pat Negri and Martha Hill was central to the completion of this project. A special thanks to Felice Schwartz, President of Catalyst, for her continuing recognition and support of career and family issues.

Our appreciation goes to freelance writer Alice Fleming for the first revision, and to statisticians Joan Brittain and Rick Peterson for their careful check of our work. We also thank Nadine Taub, Joan Bertin, Mary Ruggie, Donna Lanhoff, Sherry Cassidy and Lynn Wilcox for assisting with preparing and validating information in the legal section. Special thanks to Sheila Kamerman and Lois Hoffman for reviewing our questionnaire.

Grateful thanks to the 384 corporate respondents who took the time to fill out a 10-page questionnaire, the 112 women throughout the country who thought the subject important enough to participate in lengthy focus-group discussions and the corporate managers who allowed us to include their comments, case examples and policy excerpts.

And finally, this project would not have been possible without generous funding from the Revlon Foundation and without major support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation for Catalyst's career and family programs.

THE CORPORATE GUIDE TO PARENTAL LEAVES

Based on the findings and recommendations presented in this report, Catalyst has developed The Corporate Guide to Parental Leaves, which consolidates all the information needed to design, modify and evaluate parental leave policies so that they produce maximum benefits for individual employers and employees. To assist companies at all stages of policy development, the guide includes:

- An index of all possible policy components.
- Guidelines for combining components based on an individual employer's objectives.
- Comprehensive information on writing and communicating policy.
- A complete overview of current federal and state legislation affecting parental leave policies.
- Detailed options for handling the work of leave-takers.
- Strategies for making the transition back to work most productive.
- Suggestions for developing policies for fathers and adoptive parents.

Supplementing the text are numerous examples of actual corporate policies to aid policy planners in determining how to formulate and present policy and in learning how other companies handle parental leaves. To provide insight into employees' experiences, the guide also includes quotes and case examples drawn from Catalyst's nationwide focus groups.

CONTENTS

Preface		11
Background		13
Methodology		16
I.	Corporate Policy	23
	1. Components of a Leave Policy	23
	2. What Kinds of Leaves Do Companies Offer?	26
	3. What Kinds of Leaves Do Companies Offer to Fathers?	37
	4. Policy Variations Based on Company Differences	39
II.	Policy into Practice	43
	1. Communication of Policy	43
	2. How Work Is Handled During Leaves	48
	3. The Transition Back To Work	53
III.	Corporate Attitudes and Evolving Policy	57
	1. What Determines a Leave's Success	57
	2. What Companies Consider a Reasonable Leave Length	62
	3. Future Policy Directions	69
	4. Work and Family Initiatives	77
IV.	Catalyst's Policy Recommendations	83

CHARTS AND GRAPHS

Geographic Location of Survey Respondents	18
Payment Offered During Disability Leave	27
Average Length of Disability Leave Taken by Women as Reported by Companies	29
Conditions of Reinstatement After Disability Leave	30
Length of Unpaid Leave Offered to Women	31
Average Total Leave Taken by Women	32
Comparison of Benefits Offered During Disability and Unpaid Leaves	33
Why Policies Have Changed	35
Ways in Which Policies Have Changed, 1979-1983	37
Comparison of Average Lengths of Unpaid Leaves Offered to Women and Men	38
Policies Offered by Region	40
Policies Offered by Industry Group	41
Policies Offered by Level of Annual Sales	41
Components of Policy Explained in Employee Handbooks or Brochures	44
How Work is Handled for Managerial and Non-Managerial Leave-Takers	49
Companies Allowing Some Employees to Return Part Time for a Limited Period	54
Amount of Unpaid Leave Time Respondents Considered Reasonable for Women, Regardless of Official Policy	63
Comparison of Policy and Attitude for Companies with an Unpaid Leave Policy for Women	64
Amount of Unpaid Leave Time Respondents Considered Reasonable for Men, Regardless of Official Policy	65
Comparison of Policy and Attitude for Companies with an Unpaid Leave Policy for Men	66
Amount of Leave Time Considered Reasonable for Women by Region	67
Amount of Leave Time Considered Reasonable for Women by Size of Work Force	68
Amount of Leave Time Considered Reasonable for Men by Level of Annual Sales	68
Comparison of Future Policy Directions and Current Policy Options	69
Preferred Policy Options by Industry Group	71
Preferred Policy Options by Level of Annual Sales	72
Preferred Policy Options by Size of Work Force	73
Preferred Policy Options by Region	73

Preferred Policy Options by Gender of Respondent 74
Work and Family Initiatives: Practices and Attitudes 78
Comparison of Work and Family Initiatives by Industry Group 79
Comparison of Work and Family Initiatives by Level of Annual Sales 80
Comparison of Work and Family Initiatives by Region 81
Comparison of Work and Family Initiatives by Gender of Respondent 82

PREFACE

This report details the research findings of Catalyst's National Study of Parental Leaves. Each section reports on the results of a written survey instrument sent to corporations, on focus group discussions with managerial and non-managerial leave-takers across the country and on insights obtained from interviews with human resources policy planners. The survey data is used throughout the report as a base of information supplemented by material from interviews and focus groups that corroborates, contrasts with or amplifies survey findings.

BACKGROUND

In January of 1984, Catalyst's Career and Family Center launched a national study of corporate parental leave policies. The study, which was funded by the Revlon Foundation, had four primary objectives:

1. **To collect data** that would provide a picture of current leave policies, practices and attitudes at some of the nation's largest companies

2. **To discover how policy translated into practice** by gathering information about the experiences and attitudes of individual leave-takers

3. **To provide a source of information for policy planners** to use in evaluating, developing and implementing policies

4. **To investigate and address barriers to changes in corporate policy**

The Catalyst project was originally called "A National Study of Maternity/Parental Leaves." This title was selected for the benefit of human resources planners who might not immediately recognize the term "parental leave" if it were used alone. Researchers soon found, however, that in addition to being cumbersome, the title was confusing and raised some question of equity. Consequently the study's name was changed to "A National Study of Parental Leaves."

THE NEED FOR ADDITIONAL RESEARCH ON PARENTAL LEAVES

Much of the impetus for the current project on leaves came from an earlier Catalyst study, Corporations and Two-Career Families: Directions for the Future (1981). Although the findings on parental leaves in the 1981 report were limited, they prompted a flood of inquiries from companies who were receiving unprecedented numbers of requests for parental leaves and were also finding that, as one harried policy planner described it, "each of the pregnant women had a different plan in mind."

Companies were anxious to obtain information that could help them in two areas: developing parental leave policies and finding out how their policies compared with those of other corporations.

Concurrently, women were contacting Catalyst for information about their leave entitlements and to find out which companies offered the most generous leaves. The high volume of inquiries from both employers and employees indicated a need for additional in-depth research on the subject. Previous studies on parental leaves focused on basic components of policy, i.e., eligibility, job protection, length of leave and compensation during the leave. The Catalyst study adds substantially to this data by providing more detailed information and by comparing policies to practices and attitudes as well as to leave-takers' experiences.

In 1980-81, researchers at Columbia University examined those aspects of parental leave most relevant to public policy decision making, such as salary replacement during leave, job protection and health and medical insurance coverage during leaves.[1] Unlike Catalyst's survey, which focused on the nation's largest corporations (by level of annual sales), the Columbia study looked at companies of varying sizes (although all had annual sales in excess of $500,000). Generally speaking, respondents to the Catalyst survey were much more likely to offer disability leaves and longer leaves, and much less likely to impose length-of-service requirements on leave benefits than respondents to the Columbia study. This finding confirms the conclusion of both studies that larger companies tend

to be more generous concerning benefits than smaller ones.

It should be noted that the policies of large corporations do not represent what is likely to be normative for parental leaves in the United States. The Columbia study found, for example, that only about half of all responding companies provided short-term disability coverage. This proportion contrasts sharply with the 95% of Catalyst respondents offering disability benefits.

In 1983, the Bureau of National Affairs (B.N.A.) included parental leaves in a larger survey of Policies on Leave from Work.[2] The B.N.A. study compared the basic features of parental leave policies offered by a respondent population that included organizations in both the private and public sectors. Most of the 253 respondents had fewer than 1,000 employees; in contrast, only 17.2% of the companies in Catalyst's sample had fewer than 1,000 employees. Although the findings of the B.N.A. study regarding length of leave and type of job guarantee were corroborated by the Catalyst study, these comparisons should not be considered conclusive because the B.N.A. study did not distinguish between disability and unpaid leave. Organizations participating in the B.N.A. study appeared to have slightly more stringent length-of-service requirements.

1. Sheila B. Kamerman, Alfred J.Kahn, and Paul Kingston, Maternity Policies and Working Women (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

2. The Bureau of National Affairs, Policies on Leave from Work, Personnel Policies Forum Survey, No. 136, (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of National Affairs, 1983).

METHODOLOGY

To obtain a comprehensive picture of current parental leave policies, Catalyst's survey included four separate components:

1. A survey of the nation's top corporations
2. Group interviews with employees to explore their responses to, and experiences with, company policy
3. Interviews with human resources personnel
4. A review of the literature on the subject

THE SURVEY

The Parental Leave Survey questionnaire was an extensive, ten-page instrument designed to explore all aspects of company policy. It consisted primarily of multiple choice questions, with a few open-ended questions allowing respondents to comment more fully. The survey was divided into four parts.

1. **Policy**--identified elements included in formal or informal policies, such as disability, unpaid leave, eligibility requirements, compensation, benefits, job guarantees, length of leaves and recent corporate policy changes.

2. **Practice**--addressed how policy is communicated to employees; what exceptions to policy are made; how work of leave-taking employees is handled; how policies treat reinstatement; how many employees take leaves and for how long; and which other family supports companies offer.

3. **Attitude**--explored the length of leaves companies consider reasonable; the factors that contribute to a successful leave; which policy options companies

would consider in the future; and the major concerns of companies in considering options.

4. **Company Profile**--described industry type, geographic location of respondents, level of annual sales and size of work force.

Distribution of Survey

In January of 1984 the survey was mailed to 1,462 of the nation's 1,500 largest companies (by level of annual sales). The survey was personally addressed to either the Director of Human Resources (or an equivalent, e.g. the Director of Personnel or Administration) or, where that name was unavailable, the Chief Executive Officer or President. The questionnaire was accompanied by two brochures describing Catalyst, a letter explaining the project and a postage-paid return envelope. Companies were promised confidentiality and a copy of the report. One month after the first mailing, a second mailing that included a brief reminder letter and another copy of the survey was sent to all non-respondents.

As the March 1 deadline for returning the questionnaire approached, Catalyst received a number of phone calls from human resources executives saying that they were in the process of completing the survey and requesting to return it by express mail on the due date. One company official wrote, "We are in the process of re-examining our policy --your research will help guide us." A few who chose not to participate were not aware of the importance of the issue and stated as much. A total of 384 companies returned their completed forms, for a participation rate of 26.3%. Fourteen surveys received after the deadline could not be included in reporting the quantitative data.

Overview of Respondents

Participant companies presented a variety of profiles, based on industry group, location, level of annual sales and size of work force.

Groupings from the standard industry classification index of Standard and Poor's Register of Corporations, Directors and Executives were used to determine industry type. Over half of the participating companies (59.4% or 222 companies) were engaged in manufacturing, construction, mining or agriculture. This number also included consumer products manufacturers, high technology companies and lumber companies, among others. One quarter of respondents (28.3% or 106 companies) were in the financial or service industries, including commercial and investment banking, real estate and retail trade. The remaining 12.3% (46 companies) were from the communications, transportation and public utilities industries, including television networks, airlines and moving companies. Industry data on ten companies was unavailable.

Three hundred seventy-four participants identified themselves by state. About one-third (32.9% or 123 companies) were located in the Northeast, which included the six New England states and the five Mid-Atlantic states. Another 36.9% or 138 companies were

GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

© Catalyst 1986

headquartered in the 14 states of the North Central region and the Midwest. The remaining 30.2% were split evenly between the West (54 companies) and the South (59 companies).

All respondents recorded a high level of annual sales, which was predictable given the group surveyed. Nevertheless, some variation occured among companies in volume of sales. In reporting on differences in responses, we divided companies into three groups according to annual sales. The smaller companies (30.9% or 104 companies) reported sales of $500 million or less. Another 30.9% (104 companies) were of medium size, with sales between $501 million and $2 billion. The remaining 38.3%, the 129 larger companies, reported sales in excess of $2 billion (N=337).

Categorizing the respondent pool by size of work force, most companies were found to be large employers. Only 17.2% (65 companies) had fewer than 1,000 employees. For the purposes of this report, companies categorized as smaller (35.1% or 133 companies) are those with fewer than 2,500 employees. Medium-sized companies (31.7% or 120 companies) have between 2,500 and 9,500 employees, and large companies (33.2% or 126 companies), more than 9,500 employees (N=379).

A breakdown by gender showed that slightly more men than women filled out the questionnaire. Of those corporate human resources executives responding, 173 were men and 160 were women. Fifty-one respondents chose not to identify themselves.

Analysis of Data

In reporting the findings, percentages were calculated on the basis of the number of companies answering each particular question. Each of the percentages is based on a different N, or sample size, since the number of companies that answered each question varied. Blanks, data unavailable or "not applicables" were never included in the N for a specific question. To avoid misinterpretation of the data we include the N for each question discussed in the text. The numbers have been rounded off to the nearest tenth of a percent so in some cases they do not add up exactly to 100%.

When looking at differences among companies by industry group, region, level of annual sales and size of work force, the N for individual questions is often quite small. Therefore, these comparisons should not be considered conclusive.

EMPLOYEE FOCUS GROUPS

In order to better understand how corporate policy is experienced by leave-takers, Catalyst organized a series of discussion groups with employees who had taken parental leaves within the past five years. One hundred and twelve women participated in 16 groups, which were held in eight cities (San Francisco, Los Angeles, Pittsburgh, Minneapolis, St. Louis, Chicago, Atlanta and New York) with additional telephone interviews conducted in Dallas. Separate discussion groups were held with management and with non-management employees; one additional group was held with six new fathers. Catalyst chose not to conduct additional discussions with men because fathers were not the main focus of the study, and time and resources were limited. The discussion guide developed for the focus groups explored women's attitudes toward their leaves--what worked well for them, what did not and what they would have preferred. Among the topics covered: supervisory response to the announcement of a pregnancy, arranging for a leave, determinants of the length of leave, provisions for managing the workload, the most desirable type of leave, child care arrangements, returning to work and changes in the new parent's perspective and career path.

In talking with focus group participants we hoped to discover how company policies and perceptions conformed to employee experiences. We also wanted to learn about employee concerns that might be unknown or unaddressed by companies. From both the human resources personnel interviews and the focus group discussions, we obtained information about how companies and individuals are coping with leave-taking. We learned of successful strategies that employers and employees are using and uncovered a number of problems that remain to be addressed.

HUMAN RESOURCES PERSONNEL INTERVIEWS

In the second phase of the study, interviews were conducted with 51 company representatives. Initially, 21 senior human resources executives who had responded to the written survey were interviewed. The objectives were to explore the philosophy behind current policies and to discuss the changes companies might be planning for the future. A uniform interview discussion guide was used to find out what policy consisted of, what alternative work schedules were being implemented, how policy trends developed and evolved, attitudes toward men taking leaves, how work is handled during leaves and what other work and family initiatives were offered.

Another 30 human resources executives were interviewed at companies that reported having innovative work and family policies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Still further research was conducted regarding the legal aspects of parental leave. Literature on pregnancy discrimination was scanned and several interviews were conducted with attorneys to determine the ramifications of legislation and judicial decisions.

PART I: CORPORATE POLICY

As one of its primary goals, Catalyst's study sought information about the formally articulated parental leave policies of corporate America. Questions on written policy were posed in the survey, in interviews with human resources executives and in focus group discussions. The purpose was to learn the current official corporate posture on leaves. This must be distinguished, however, from current practice, which the study investigated separately.

COMPONENTS OF A LEAVE POLICY

A written parental leave policy can consist of many different components. The following are definitions of the aspects of policy relevant to our study. These components may be combined in a variety of ways, allowing companies to tailor policies to suit their needs.

Adoption Benefits

Adoption leaves, generally unpaid, can be granted to employee parents to enable them to spend time with an adopted child. A company can also help defray the costs of adoption by reimbursing employees for all or part of their adoption expenses. Adoption benefits need not pertain to infants only but can be extended to adopted children of any age.

Anticipated Disability Leave

Some companies grant leaves to employees who need to prepare for a foreseeable medical disability. Pregnancy is sometimes included in this category. An anticipated leave precedes the disability period and is generally unpaid. Because 0-2 weeks prior to delivery is certifiable as medical disability, an anticipated disability leave could cover the period from 2-4 weeks before delivery.

Benefits

The status of an employee's benefits during the leave depends on the type and length of leave taken. While benefits are usually paid during disability, employees are sometimes required to pay a greater share, or even the full cost, of their medical benefits during an unpaid leave. Benefits that depend on an employee's length of service, such as retirement or profit-sharing plans, may also be affected by the length of leave.

Disability Leave

Disability leave, as it relates to pregnancy, is a leave given to new mothers for the length of time they are medically disabled by pregnancy. A woman may be certified as medically disabled from 0-2 weeks prior to her delivery date and for 6-8 weeks afterward. Such a leave may be fully or partially paid, or unpaid, depending on the company's short-term disability policy.

Eligibility Requirements

Eligibility requirements include any restrictions or qualifications a company uses to determine who can take leaves and under what conditions. These requirements need not be consistent for every aspect of policy. A company may offer disability leaves to all employees, for example, but limit unpaid leaves to individuals who have been employed for at least 10 months.

Length of Leave

In deciding its unpaid leave policy, a company should consider the <u>total</u> amount of time it wishes to make available to new parents. The length of a disability leave is determined by the individual woman's medical condition but, for a normal birth, the time is generally assumed to be six to eight weeks. An unpaid leave can range in length from one month to one year, depending on company policy. If a company chooses to offer a four-month total leave, for example, it may assume that, for new mothers, two-months will be covered by

disability and an additional two months will consist of unpaid leave. New fathers and adoptive mothers would not be entitled to disability but could take the entire four months as unpaid leave.

Limited Part-Time Return

A limited part-time return schedule provides for an interim period that may assist employees in making the transition back to full-time work. Employees using this option may work half their usual hours or any fractional time over the course of a three- to five-day work week. A limited part-time schedule can remain in effect anywhere from several weeks to several months.

Post-Disability Leave

Post-disability leave allows a disabled employee to take time off after the physical recovery from an illness or injury. Almost always unpaid and comparable in length to other unpaid leaves of absence, a post-disability leave can be offered only to employees who have a medical condition qualifying them for disability leave. Such leaves are thus restricted to natural mothers and, in contrast to unpaid leaves, are not legally required for equity's sake to be made available to adoptive parents or natural fathers.

Reinstatement

The reinstatement portion of a leave policy delineates the terms under which an employee will return to work after her leave and, specifically, the job to which she will return. Its provisions can vary depending on the type or length of leave taken.

Seniority

In some companies, an employee does not earn length-of-service credits during a leave of absence. If this is the case, the worker may lose some seniority and whatever benefits

accrued to it (e.g. priority for scheduling shifts, review date for annual raise or promotion).

Subsequent Time Off

The length of leave taken could affect the number of an employee's vacation, personal and sick days, or when she can take them. A company may choose to require that an employee use up all her paid time off before taking any unpaid leave of absence for child care reasons. These conditions should be clearly stated in the written policy.

Unpaid Leave

An unpaid leave may be offered to the new mother to enable her to care for and develop a relationship with the baby. This type of leave may also be offered to new fathers and to adopting parents.

WHAT KINDS OF LEAVES DO COMPANIES OFFER?

The first part of the survey explored what companies offered in their written policies, and under what conditions various options were offered. Most respondents granted employees a fully or partially paid disability leave with some type of job guarantee. About half included an unpaid leave for women with a job guarantee as part of their written policy. A growing number of companies are also beginning to offer unpaid leaves with job guarantees to natural fathers and adoptive parents. When they are included in formal policy, these parental leave benefits for maternity, paternity and adoption are usually available to employees at all job levels and with only a minimum length of service. Some variation was observed in the kinds of benefits offered by industry group, region and level of annual sales.

Catalyst also found that leave policies are still evolving. A substantial number of companies said that they had changed their policies in the past five years, primarily in

response to the passage of the Pregnancy Discrimination Act (1978). Responses to other survey questions indicated that companies would consider making policy changes in the future.

DISABILITY LEAVES

Most respondents offer disability leave.

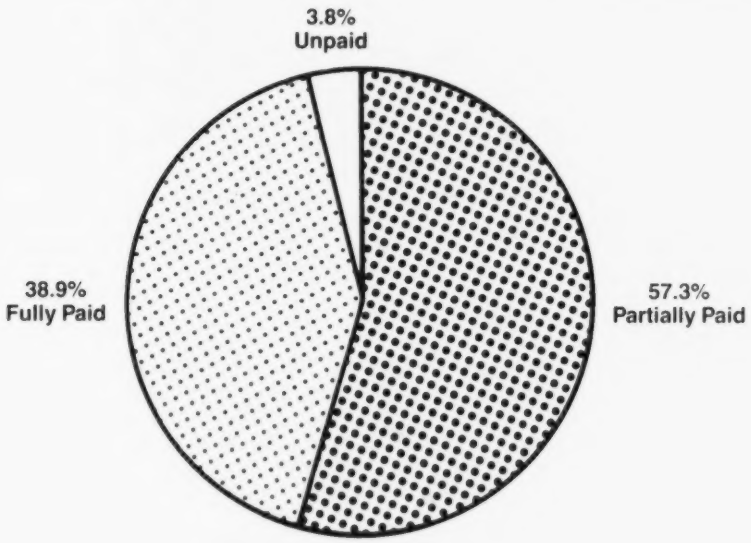
Fully 95% of survey respondents grant short-term disability leaves to employees. The source of disability insurance coverage is usually private (61.7% of companies). A quarter of companies (23.2%), though, have a combination of state and private coverage and the remaining 10.2% offer state-mandated disability insurance (N=324).

Most disability leaves are paid.

All but a few companies provide some compensation during disability dependent on length of service, job rank or a combination of the two. Over half of respondents state that the leave period is partially paid and over a third that it is fully paid.

PAYMENT OFFERED DURING DISABILITY LEAVE

(N = 314)



© Catalyst 1986

A majority of companies (62.7%) linked compensation during disability to an employee's length of service; 37.3% did not (N=306). Job rank determined compensation at a quarter of the companies (26.8%) but was not a factor at most (73.2%) companies (N=254).

Eligibility for disability benefits usually begins when an employee starts his or her job. Half of responding companies (49.2%) had no minimum service requirement. Another fifth (20.3%) required only three months of service, and 16.2% stipulated employment of six months to two years. The remaining 14.3% had other length of service requirements, including variations within companies by union bargaining agreement and by division (N=321).

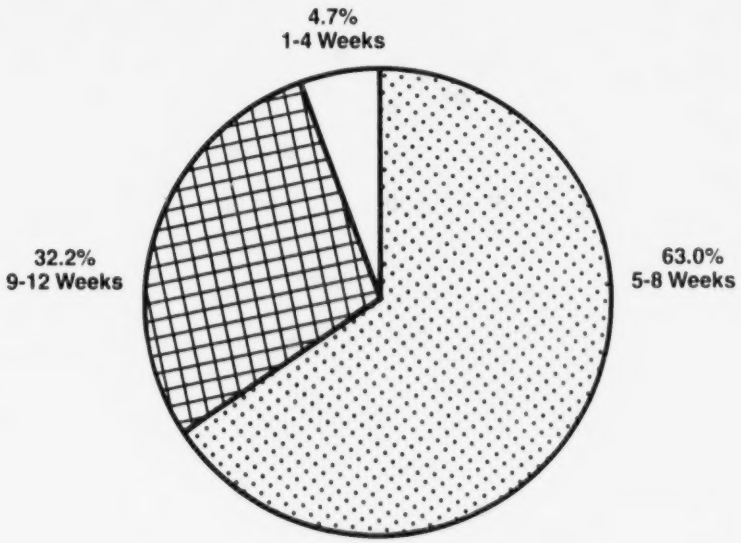
Compensation during parental leaves includes not only salary but continuation of benefits. Almost all corporate respondents (90.2%) continued full benefits during disability. A few companies, however, stipulated that benefits would continue only if the employee paid most (2.8%) or all (5.2%) of the cost. A handful said that benefits were reduced (1.2%) or curtailed (0.6%) during disability.

Disability leaves are usually five to eight weeks long.

Length of disability leave is determined by an employee's medical condition. Her physical status is usually assessed by her physician, although occasionally companies will require employees to be examined and have the length of leave determined by a company-appointed physician. Most physicians consider a normal or average pregnancy disability to be two weeks prior to and six weeks following delivery. A cesarean section may warrant an additional two weeks or more after delivery.

AVERAGE LENGTH OF DISABILITY LEAVE TAKEN BY WOMEN AS REPORTED BY COMPANIES

(N = 320)

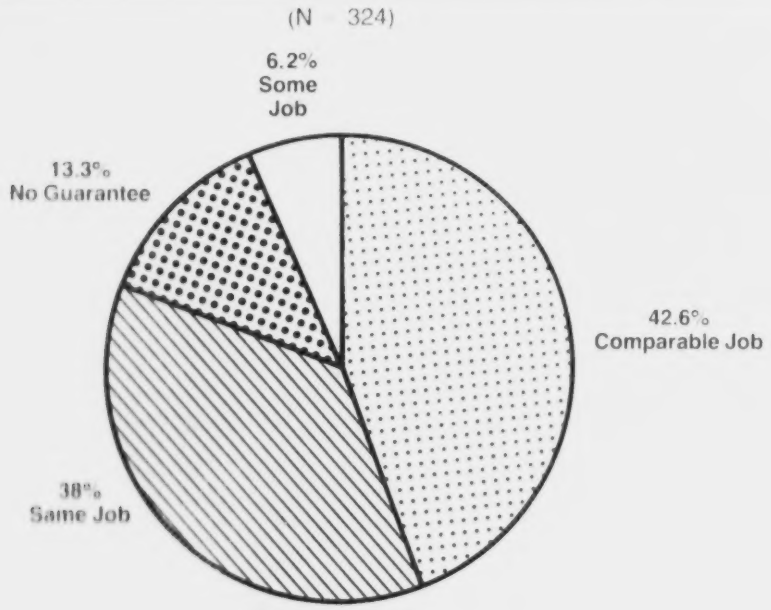


© Catalyst 1986

Disability leave benefits often include job reinstatement.

The existence of some type of job guarantee is critical to employees taking parental leaves. Without promise of reinstatement, taking a leave is tantamount to quitting. By and large, responding companies did offer some type of job guarantee during disability; in slightly more cases it was a comparable job rather than the same job. To employees, the difference between a comparable job and the same job can be significant. If an employee is on a focused career track, she may lose out by having to return to a different job and essentially work her way back up to the level at which she left.

CONDITIONS OF REINSTATEMENT AFTER DISABILITY LEAVE



Catalyst 1986

UNPAID LEAVES

Half of responding companies offer an unpaid leave other than disability to women.

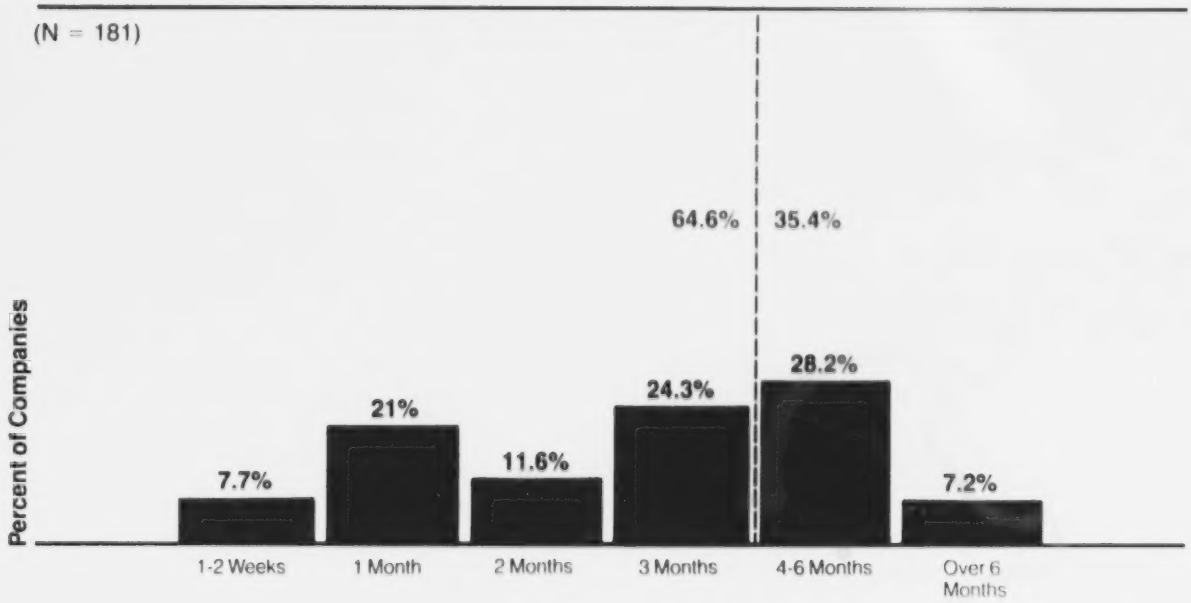
Unpaid leave for women, which was offered by 51.8% of responding companies (N=328), is the second most common element of a parental leave policy. For women, unpaid leave is usually taken after the disability period and, for men, after the birth of the child. This leave is frequently used by new parents to spend time with the baby and to line up child care. Although some companies might offer a leave during which benefits are continued but job guarantees are omitted, Catalyst included in its data only those companies offering job reinstatement. We assumed--and focus groups confirmed--that the conditions of reinstatement heavily influence the employee's decision on whether or not to take unpaid leave and, if so, for how long.

The conditions of reinstatement usually stipulated the length of unpaid leave an employee could take and be reinstated to the same position, a comparable one or some job. At some companies employees could opt either for a shorter leave with a guarantee of the same job, or for a longer one with reinstatement to a comparable position. Of the companies that granted unpaid leaves with job guarantees, a substantial number guaranteed a comparable job (49.7%) and only slightly fewer gave leave-takers the same job (40.4%). A smaller percentage (9.8%) guaranteed some job (N=183).

Unpaid leaves vary considerably in length.

The length of unpaid leave with a job guarantee ranged from one week to a year, but in over half the cases the length was three months or less.

LENGTH OF UNPAID LEAVE OFFERED TO WOMEN



Length of Leave

© Catalyst 1986

Companies were also asked to report the total combined length of leave, including disability and unpaid leave, that employees take. More than three-quarters of companies responding to the question reported three months or less. Fewer than a sixth reported leaves of more than five months.

AVERAGE TOTAL LEAVE TAKEN BY WOMEN

	Managerial Women (N=143)	Non-Managerial Women (N=188)
3-8 weeks	45.4%	43.6%
9-12 weeks	32.3%	35.0%
13-20 weeks	14.7%	13.9%
Over 20 weeks	7.7%	7.5%

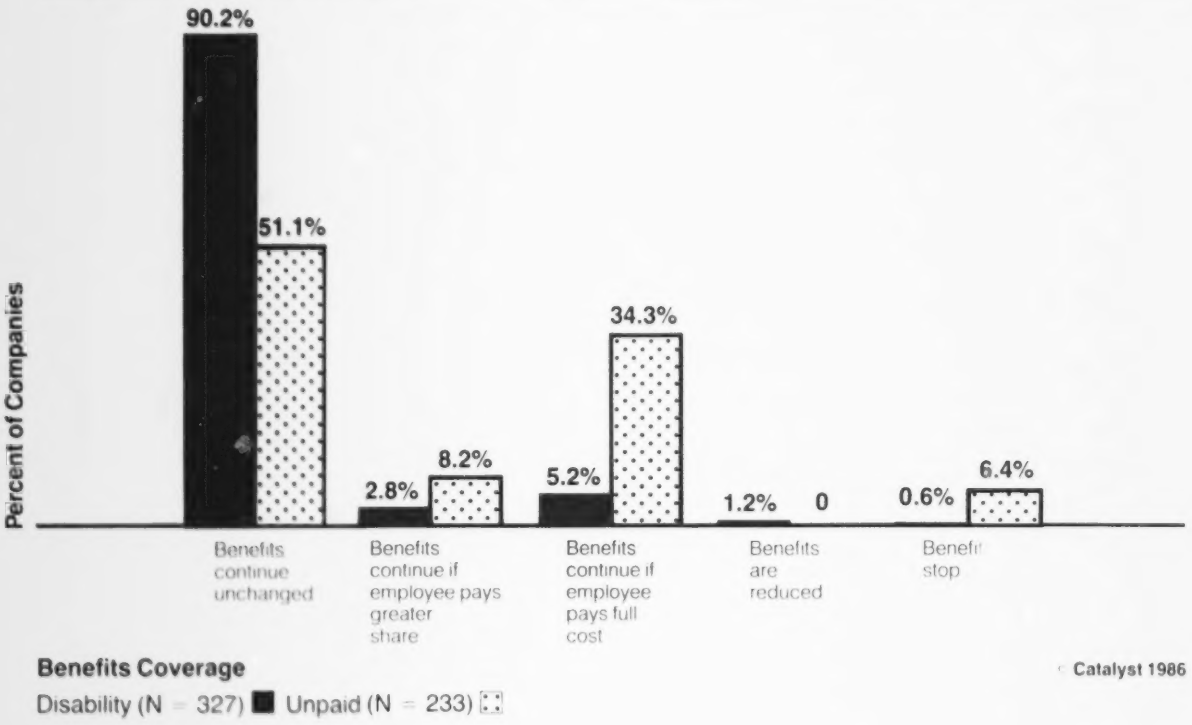
At first glance, it may seem that women are taking far less leave than they are actually offered. This could be accounted for by the financial considerations of individual employees but, since the companies' reports of total leave taken are roughly the same for both managerial and non-managerial women, economic need is less likely to be the major factor. A more plausible explanation for the discrepancy between the generous unpaid leaves offered and the brief leaves reported may lie in how companies' responses were prepared.

It may well be that the companies with the most limited leave policies (disability and short unpaid leaves only) found it simpler to answer the question. Companies with more extensive policies would have had to compile statistics, a more arduous task, and may therefore not have answered the question.

Employees often take reponsibility for continuing benefits coverage during unpaid leave. Unlike disability policies, many unpaid leave policies require that employees pay all or part of the premiums in order to continue benefits during unpaid leaves. Employees must pay the

full premium at a third of the responding companies (34.3%) and part of the premium at 8.2% of companies. About half of the companies continue employees' benefits entitlements unchanged (51.1%). At only 6.4% of companies do benefits stop (N=233).

COMPARISON OF BENEFITS OFFERED DURING DISABILITY AND UNPAID LEAVES



Many part-time workers receive no parental leave benefits.

In just under half of respondent companies (46.6%), part-time employees receive no parental leave benefits whatsoever. In nearly a quarter of the companies (24.9%), those who were eligible for benefits often did not receive as many as full-time employees did. In only 28.5% of the companies were part-time employees eligible for full parental leave benefits (N=326).

ADOPTION LEAVES

Since 1980 there has been a notable increase in the number of companies offering adoption benefits.

In its 1980 study of Fortune 1,300 companies, Catalyst found that only 10.3% offered adoption benefits. The 1984 survey of a similar population showed a significant increase. More than a quarter of respondents (27.5%) now offer such benefits. Adoption benefits were also reported among the options under consideration by companies planning to alter their parental leave policies. At the present time, 17.5% address adoption in a formal policy and 10% handle it informally (N=331).

While leaves for adoption are generally unpaid, about one-third of companies that have adoption policies (31.8%) reimburse employees for adoption expenses. The amount of reimbursement varied. Two companies set no limit and 12 set a maximum of $1,000. Eight other companies set a range of between $1,200 and $2,000. One of these companies, however, reimbursed employees up to $5,000 for foreign adoptions. Four companies specified that they reimburse medical expenses only (N=85).

As an eligibility requirement, companies sometimes set an age limit for the adopted child. Most companies (61.8%) offering adoption benefits set 18 years as the maximum age of the child for whom benefits would be allowed. A smaller percentage (11.8%) of respondents limited benefits to those adopting "infants" or up-to-one-year-old babies and 5.9% set varying age limits for adoptees under age 18. One-fifth of respondents had set no age limit (N=68).

CHANGES IN PARENTAL LEAVE POLICIES

The Pregnancy Discrimination Act (PDA) of 1978 has had a strong impact on company policies.

Over half of corporate respondents (53%) had modified their parental leave policies in the past five years, and many cited as their reason passage of the PDA, which requires that

pregnancy be treated like any other disability (N=330). Other less frequently cited reasons for changes were: to keep pace with other companies in the industry; to respond to increasing numbers of employees in general--or managers in particular--requesting leaves; to attract and recruit new employees.

WHY POLICIES HAVE CHANGED (Multiple responses possible)

Reasons for Changing Parental Leave Policy	**Percentage of Companies** (N=179)
PDA	87.7%
To keep pace with others in the industry	20.1%
Increase in numbers of employees asking for leaves	12.9%
More managerial women asking for leaves	9.5%
To attract and recruit employees	7.3%
Female employees initiated discussions of possible changes	5.0%
Union negotiations	4.5%
Male employees expressed concern	3.9%
Other (these reasons included: to have a uniform policy, policy for all disabilities was changed, and routine revision of all Supervisor's Manual Procedures)	14.0%

Companies cited a variety of ways in which policy has changed.

In order to determine the ways in which policy has evolved, the survey instrument asked respondents to describe how (if at all) policy had changed. Of the companies responding to this open-ended question, 61.8% stated that policy had changed to conform with the Pregnancy Discrimination Act (N=157). In some cases companies described specifically how the PDA had changed their policies; in others they merely cited the PDA as being the impetus for the change.

One frequent policy change after passage of the PDA was in the length of leave offered. As a reflection of the PDA's extension of disability policies to pregnant employees, there was some tendency among companies (34.8%) to show an increased length of paid (disability) leave. Some companies (23.2%) appear to have decreased the length of their unpaid leaves. Follow-up interviews with human resources administrators indicated that some employers who had had flexible, liberal responses to maternity leave requests changed their policies to offer only what was now legally required. Others, however, have made their unpaid leaves longer (13.4%) and most (63.4%) have maintained their former length.

In addition, 38.2% of respondents cited ways in which their policies had changed other than to conform to the PDA (N=157). A few of these modifications may be at least indirectly attributable to the PDA. Some companies reported an increased standardization and clarification of policy. Others cited a more consistent application of existing policy. Since the PDA called attention to the issue of parental leave, it may well have led companies to formalize previously informal or ad hoc policies. Reported changes in parental leave policy apparently unrelated to the PDA include the expansion and addition of benefits, such as allowing employees to use sick days for maternity, making unpaid leaves available to men, offering leaves to adoptive parents and extending benefits during leaves.

WAYS IN WHICH POLICIES HAVE CHANGED, 1979-1983

	Increased	Decreased ($172 \leq N \leq 188$)	No Change
Formality of policy	57.4%	3.2%	39.4%
Eligibility restrictions	20.2%	23.7%	56.1%
Length of paid leave	34.8%	9.9%	55.2%
Length of unpaid leave	13.4%	23.2%	63.4%

WHAT KINDS OF LEAVES DO COMPANIES OFFER TO FATHERS?

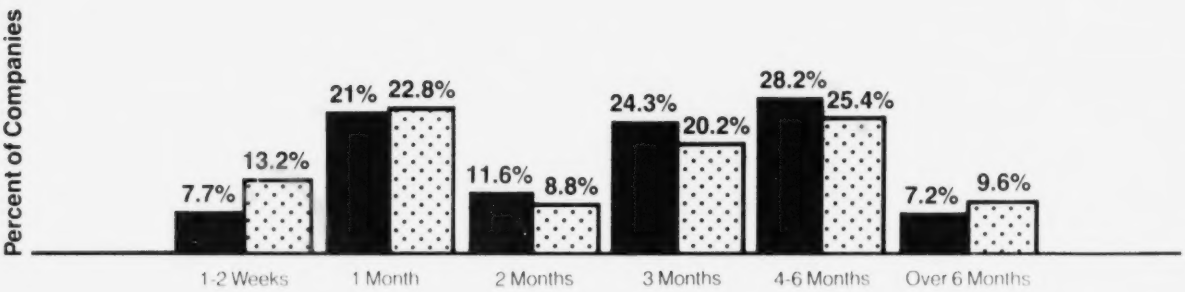
Companies are offering men parental leaves, but very few are taking them.

Over a third of survey respondents (37.0%) reported that they offer an unpaid leave with a job guarantee to men (N=322). This practice is not usually called paternity or parental leave but instead is covered under the company's general personal leave or leave-of-absence policy. Much less frequently, unpaid time off for men was described as leave for care of newborn child, child care leave or dependent care leave.

The unpaid leaves offered to men were similar in length to those offered to women -- generally between one and six months.

COMPARISON OF AVERAGE LENGTHS OF UNPAID LEAVES OFFERED TO WOMEN AND MEN

Women (N = 181) ■ Men (N = 114) ⁘



Average Length of Unpaid Leave Offered

© Catalyst 1986

Despite the fact that companies are increasingly offering leaves to new fathers, only nine companies reported that men took advantage of the leave policy. Follow-up discussions with human resources policymakers indicate that it is fairly common for fathers to take a few days off at the time of the child's birth, but they rarely request this time as a separate paternity leave. More often, men use their vacation days or arrange to take the time off informally as paid or unpaid personal days. There may be several explanations for this apparent underuse of leave policy. If paternity leave is covered under a general leave-of-absence policy, some employees may not be aware of the option. It is equally possible that, although companies have paternity leave policies on the books, the corporate climate does not encourage men to take advantage of them. In follow-up discussions with policy planners, it became evident that in some companies it is considered inappropriate for men to request leaves even when policy exists.

Reinstatement policies for men are similar to those for women--a little less than half of responding companies (46.5%) guaranteed a comparable job; 43.0% guaranteed the same job; and 10.5% guaranteed some job (N=114). If men wished their benefits to continue during unpaid leaves, they had to pay the full cost in 31.2% of the cases, and a greater share of the cost in 8.8% of the cases. Benefits were curtailed during the leave at only a few companies (6.9%) and continued unchanged at over half (53.1%) (N=160).

POLICY VARIATIONS BASED ON COMPANY DIFFERENCES

Parental leave policies varied by region, industry group, level of annual sales and size of work force.

When looking at differences among companies, the N for individual questions is often quite small. For this reason, these comparisons should be considered suggestive rather than conclusive.

REGION

The South lagged behind other regions in offering unpaid leaves and adoption benefits. There was little regional variation, however, in the granting of disability leave and part-time return from leaves.

POLICIES OFFERED BY REGION*

	Northeast (105≤N≤108)	Midwest (110≤N≤117)	West (47≤N≤48)	South (51≤N≤53)
Unpaid leave for women	55%	54%	55%	39%
Unpaid leave for men	39%	38%	42%	22%
Adoption	35%	32%	15%	17%

* Numbers have been rounded to the nearest percent.

INDUSTRY GROUP

Transportation, communications and public utilities companies were most generous in offering unpaid leaves to women and adoption benefits.

Service and financial companies were most likely to allow women to return to work part time for a limited period after a leave. Manufacturing, construction and agriculture companies tended to be the least likely to grant adoption benefits to parents.

Unpaid leave for men and disability appeared to be offered equally in the various industry groups.

POLICIES OFFERED BY INDUSTRY GROUP*

	Manufacturing/ Construction (179≤N≤190)	Service/ Financial (103≤N≤105)	Transportation/ Communications/Utilities (36≤N≤38)
Unpaid leave for women	51%	49%	68%
Adoption	22%	30%	50%
Part-time return	52%	80%	46%

*Numbers have been rounded to the nearest percent.

ANNUAL SALES

Companies with higher annual sales were most likely to have written policies, offer adoption benefits and allow women to return to work part-time on a limited basis. Such benefits and flexibility were least likely to be found at companies with low sales. Annual sales did not seem to affect the extent to which unpaid leaves were offered to women or men.

POLICIES OFFERED BY LEVEL OF ANNUAL SALES*+

	Higher (89≤N≤97)	Medium (120≤N≤134)	Lower (83≤N≤104)
Written policies	93%	86%	77%
Adoption	43%	30%	13%
Part-time return	67%	57%	51%

*Higher sales = $2 billion or more; medium sales = $501 million–$2 billion; lower sales = $500 million or less.
+Numbers have been rounded to the nearest percent.

SIZE OF WORK FORCE

Size of work force had little effect on policy components.

Adoption benefits was the only area of parental leave policy substantially affected by size of work force. While 39% of larger companies and 31% of medium-sized companies offered adoption policies, only 13% of smaller companies did so.

PART II: POLICY INTO PRACTICE

A report on corporate parental leave policies presents only one part of the picture. As we have already noted concerning leaves "offered" to men, written policies are not necessarily communicated or used. It thus becomes crucial to explore, in depth, how companies implement their policies. To do this we asked not only what length leave employees are taking, but also how policy is communicated, how employees' work is handled and how the transition back to work is managed.

COMMUNICATION OF POLICY

A key component in developing an effective policy is ensuring its clear dissemination throughout the company. Many companies named clear communication of policy as the most important factor in a successful leave (38.8%)(N=237). A company with an accessible, easily understood policy, one that acknowledges parental leave as an expected part of an employee's work life, conveys a strong, positive message of the corporate culture's support of family needs. A policy of this type can also serve as a valuable recruitment tool. While most companies believed their written leave policies were communicated clearly, focus group discussions suggested the contrary. Focus group participants also expressed a number of other concerns which companies either did not recognize or chose not to address. Most of these were related to the career or job impact of taking a leave.

The primary source of anxiety for a great many women was inadequate information about policy. Some participants said that policies were not clearly identified as pertaining to parental leave; instead, descriptions of policy were fragmented between disability policies and personal leave policies. Others reported difficulty in locating a

description of policy. The lack of complete and available information for employees and supervisors sometimes resulted in inconsistent or incorrect interpretations of policy.

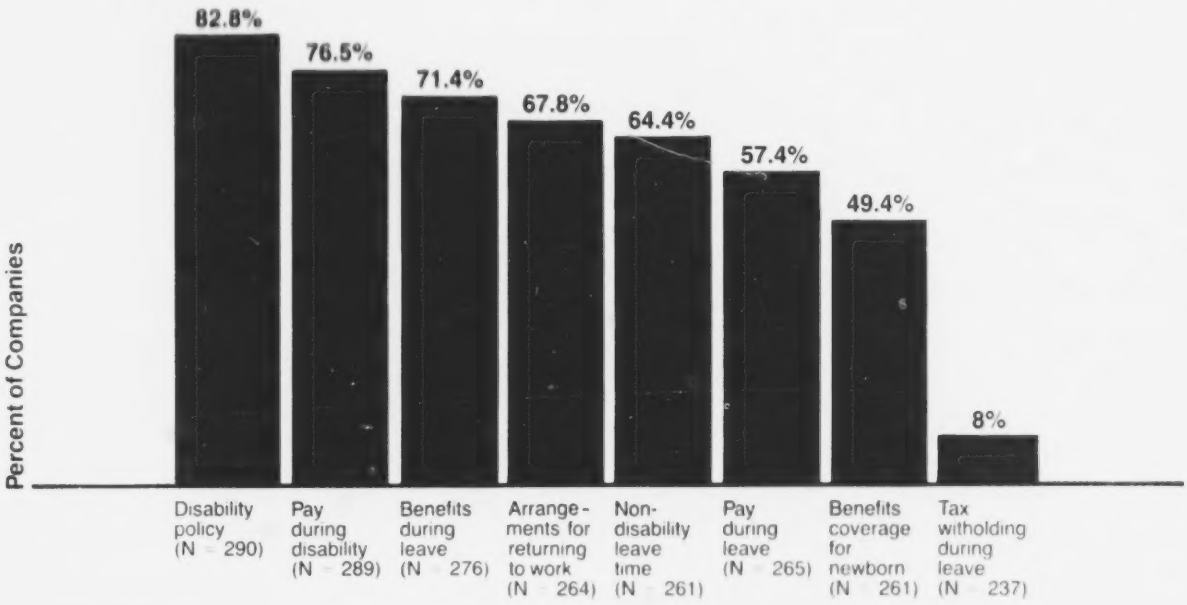
The fundamental step in good communication is providing employees with information about leave policy. This means not only making the information available, but conveying it in a written format that can be easily understood. To find out how employees learned about leaves, employers were asked to name employees' primary source of policy information. The most common responses included human resources personnel, employee handbooks or supervisors.

Some aspects of leave policy are neglected in communications.

Responses to a question about the aspects of leave policies included in employee handbooks or brochures indicated that some important areas of policy were generally included, but others were omitted. Companies named the following as the most commonly included features: disability policy, pay during disability and benefits during the leave.

COMPONENTS OF POLICY EXPLAINED IN EMPLOYEE HANDBOOKS OR BROCHURES

(Multiple responses possible)



Components

© Catalyst 1986

Some critical aspects of leaves were not included in the written policies of a substantial proportion of responding companies. Many excluded policy statements about non-disability leave time (35.6%), pay during non-disability leave (42.6%), arrangements for returning to work (32.2%), benefits coverage for newborns (50.6%) and tax withholding during leave (91.9%). These omissions in written policies create the potential for miscommunication. While focus group participants in general seemed aware of what length leaves they were entitled to, they were often confused about benefits coverage during leave and job reinstatement. Awareness of such information helps women plan their pregnancies around policy. According to a secretary in St. Louis, "I knew from word of mouth that I'd be better off waiting five years before I got pregnant so I could qualify for full benefits."

An important finding that emerged in focus group discussions was that the chief problem was often not the lack of a comprehensive policy, but the fact that few employees or supervisors had knowledge of or access to it. At some companies the employee handbook featured no separate section on parental leaves. The information was instead integrated into sections on disability and personal leaves. One woman found herself completely frustrated. "No one ever explained the policy to me and it wasn't written anywhere," she said. Such difficulties were not uncommon and often fostered an adversarial relationship between employee and company.

The motivation for more or less masking benefits may be a legal one. Companies may be reluctant to differentiate maternity from disability leave, or parental leave from other personal leaves, for fear of seeming to treat pregnant women differently from other employees. Failure to specifically note maternity and parental leave provisions can, however, cause employees to feel uncertain about their entitlements.

When questioned about clarity, almost three-quarters of responding companies said that their policies were clear and that employees had few questions (71.4%). Over a

quarter of companies answering the question did recognize a communications problem and reported that their employees frequently posed questions regarding policy (28.6%) (N=336).

Once policy is understood, arranging for parental leaves is easy.

A high proportion of companies (86.4%) responding to the survey question said that setting up a leave period and arranging for the continuation of benefits were relatively easy. Only 13% thought making arrangements for a leave was difficult and even fewer (.6%) considered the process very difficult (N=339). Focus group participants confirmed this finding.

Few exceptions are made to policy.

The survey results revealed that the conditions set forth in formal written policy are adhered to fairly rigidly. When asked if exceptions were made to policy, three-quarters of responding companies said that their policies had little or no flexibility (73.3%). Slightly over one quarter do make exceptions (26.7%), however, and nearly all of these companies indicated that flexibility is allowed equally for managers and non-managers (N=330).

Focus group discussions also confirmed that exceptions to policy were made equally for managers and non-managers. The most common exceptions seemed to be negotiating for the same, rather than a comparable, position upon return and returning to work part-time.

When Catalyst inquired how conditions are determined for maternity leave, other than disability, over half of responding companies said that formal written policy is adhered to (58.8%). The next most frequent response was that conditions are determined by the employee in conjunction with his or her supervisor (13.8%). Another five percent reported that the supervisor alone set the conditions, and 22.5% named another party as well, e.g. the supervisor in conjunction with the human resources department (N=320).

Companies rarely address a number of other employee concerns.

Disseminating policy is only the first stage of adequate communication concerning parental leaves. Female focus group participants discussed several communications issues not addressed by companies and of which they seemed unaware.

- **Discomfort over informing supervisors about their pregnancies.**

  Women often felt anxious about telling their supervisors they were pregnant. They feared that once they announced their condition, they would be treated differently and given less challenging assignments. Many felt that pregnancy called attention to the fact that they were female and undermined their credibility as managers or workers.

- **Difficulty convincing supervisors of their commitment.**

  In many cases pregnancy seemed to change supervisors' perceptions of their employees' commitment. Focus group participants repeatedly told of difficulties assuring supervisors that they would return from leaves. "I told them right away that I was coming back but they didn't believe me," one woman reported. "No matter how many times I told them they were always talking as if I wouldn't return." In a similar case, a financial manager on the west coast described now her supervisors took away all her accounts and refused to give her any nev ones despite her insistance that she was definitely coming back.

- **Lack of assurance about the impact on their careers.**

  A more long-range worry for women was how taking a leave might affect their opportunities for career advancement. A management-level woman in St. Louis said, "I would have liked to have had discussions with my supervisor about my further development and future career plans. Then I would have left with the feeling that I had a job worth returning to."

HOW WORK IS HANDLED DURING LEAVES

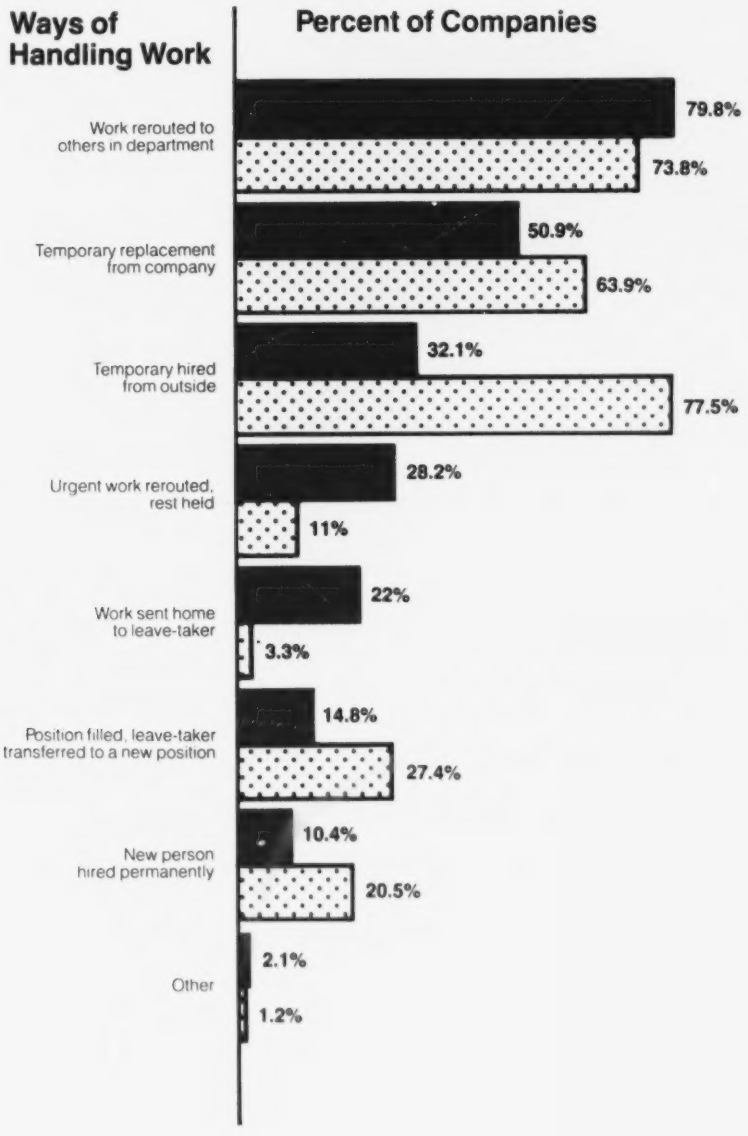
One concern that surfaces in almost every discussion of parental leave is how the company will survive the absence of a leave-taker. Since large numbers of employees are now regularly taking leaves, the issue of how to handle work without impairing productivity is of paramount importance to employers. Companies reported considerable variation in their methods of dealing with the situation. Certain specific strategies, such as rerouting work to others in the department, were commonly used for both managerial and non-managerial leave-takers. Other strategies were used predominantly with one group or the other. For both groups, planning well in advance for a leave and involving the leave-taker in any arrangements were essential to handling work effectively.

The main strategies for handling work during a leave are the same for managers and non-managers, but some of the approaches differ.

Respondent companies reported that the work of any leave-taker was handled primarily by rerouting it to others in the same department, or by hiring a temporary replacement either from inside or from outside the company. When a temporary replacement for a manager was hired, however, the replacement was generally asked to assume only part a of the customary work load. It was also more common with managers to have only urgent work rerouted; the rest was either held or sent to the leave-takers' homes.

HOW WORK IS HANDLED FOR MANAGERIAL AND NON-MANAGERIAL LEAVE-TAKERS

(N = 337) Multiple Answers Possible



© Catalyst 1986

Many managerial-level women work at home.

There is some indication that the extent of work managers completed at home during their leaves was underreported in Catalyst's questionnaire. About a quarter of respondent companies cited this as one way work is handled. The indication from focus groups,

however, is that women are doing far more work at home than companies realize. Almost all managerial-level women in the focus groups reported that they had completed some work while officially out on leave, ranging from writing reports, receiving and handling mail and taking phone calls, to going in to the office occasionally or conducting meetings at home. Except for the disability period, this work was unpaid. One financial analyst said, "People were delivering material to me in the hospital every day for a week. When I got home, I had office mail dropped off twice a week."

For the most part, managerial leave-takers reported working at home during their leaves. The attitude of one focus group participant was typical: "I wanted to keep my hand in and find out what was going on while I wasn't there," she said. She, however, atypically chose to go in to the office one day a week during her leave to maintain contact. For the most part women seemed to enjoy doing some work during their leaves, although a few regretted it later. Employees' attitudes depended almost exclusively on the size of the work load and the degree to which they were pressured into working.

Handling the work of leave-takers is an ongoing concern at most companies.

Even if individual, short-term arrangements are satisfactory, handling work is a major issue for employers in considering extended leaves and in developing innovative policies.

Once implemented, the arrangements for handling the work of leave-takers were usually satisfactory. According to 15.9% of respondents, the practices used in handling the work of managerial women on leave were very satisfactory; 68.9% described their practices as satisfactory. Only a few considered their arrangements somewhat unsatisfactory (14.9%) or unsatisfactory (.3%)(N=308). These figures were almost identical concerning the work of non-managerial women.

Focus group participants said that advance planning and involving leave-takers in the arrangements were critical to handling work effectively.

By devising methods of handling work long before they left, both managers and non-managers minimized disruptions in their departments. For managers, planning meant assessing their work loads, determining what work to delegate and to whom, making arrangements for handling clients and subordinates and deciding what projects could be deferred until their return. To facilitate planning they also tried to complete current projects and avoid taking on new ones. As an example, a banking officer whose job featured a high level of customer contact wrote a memo to her supervisor during her seventh month which outlined her suggestions for selecting and training a temporary replacement. She then drafted a letter to each of her customers, telling them of her pregnancy and listing the names of her replacement and her supervisor. "They appreciated the fact that I had given some thought to how we could maintain the status quo until I got back," she said.

Non-managerial focus group participants reported that they generally planned for their leaves by providing written instructions and schedules and by training their replacements. One administrative assistant said, "Because I care about my boss and wanted everything to run smoothly, I wrote a manual of everything I do before I left. I also told the other secretaries where all the information was located so that if somebody called with a question they could find the answer without any trouble."

In planning for handling work during their leaves, both managerial and non-managerial women displayed a strong sense of responsibility to their jobs, coworkers and supervisors.

Non-managers and managers alike demonstrated commitment to work above and beyond the call of duty. Many non-managers completed extra work before their leaves to prepare for a replacement, or telephoned the office during their leaves to answer questions about their work. It was not uncommon for a manager to plan her pregnancy around a company's down-time.

As one woman explained, "You owe it to yourself to take care of what you're working on. It's called professionalism." Such commitment made the handling of work smoother and the leave-taker's return easier.

Work was handled better when supervisors participated in leave planning.

One problem mentioned by a number of focus group participants was the lack of participation by supervisors in planning for handling work. To a number of employees it seemed as if their bosses did not anticipate accurately the impact of an impending absence, nor did they understand what their jobs entailed. Several focus group participants complained that temporary replacements were not hired far enough in advance to receive adequate training . Often leave-takers felt they had to push their supervisors into preparing for their leaves. "My boss didn't want to face the fact that I was leaving," said one employee. "I had to hound him and say 'let's sit down and plan this.' "

Survey respondents commented on the positive and negative aspects of their arrangements for handling work. Assigning individuals within a department or company to serve as temporary replacements elicited such positive comments as "provides opportunities for greater cross-training," and "if the incumbent does not return, a trained and available person is already on the payroll to take over for her." When work is rerouted, one disadvantage can be the imposition of extra work on other employees. Disadvantages of hiring outside temporary replacements included the expense and the temporary loss in productivity due to their inexperience. Supervisors who were uncertain about whether or not employees would return displayed the greatest difficulty in making appropriate arrangements.

Many companies reported that their staffs found it considerably easier to handle the work of non-managerial than managerial leave-takers. Supervisory and decision-making abilities were perceived as being more difficult to replace.

THE TRANSITION BACK TO WORK

One of the most promising options for parental leave policies and practices is allowing leave-takers to return to work on a part-time schedule. Giving new parents a limited period in which they can work part time provides them with an opportunity to make the transition from full-time parents to full-time employees. A part-time return provision can last anywhere from a few weeks to several months.

Many women want to return on a limited part-time basis.

When asked which aspect of their leave they would prefer to have changed, most focus group participants replied that they wished they could have returned to work part time or on a flexible schedule. While some employees would have preferred to be able to work part time permanently, many would have been content with being allowed a few months on a part-time schedule. "Even one or two weeks of partial work (four full days a week or five partial days) would have made the transition more efficient for everyone," one woman said. "It's very difficult to jump right in and pick up exactly where you left off."

Participants who were able to arrange a limited part-time return were quite satisfied with the results. Some used the extra day or two at home to test out child care arrangements, so they would feel comfortable leaving the infant and returning to work full time. Others found that part-time schedules allowed them to ease back into hectic jobs. This was particularly appreciated when a colicky baby prevented its mother from enjoying a full night's sleep. Many employees reported that they were able to do most or all of their jobs in less time by working more efficiently.

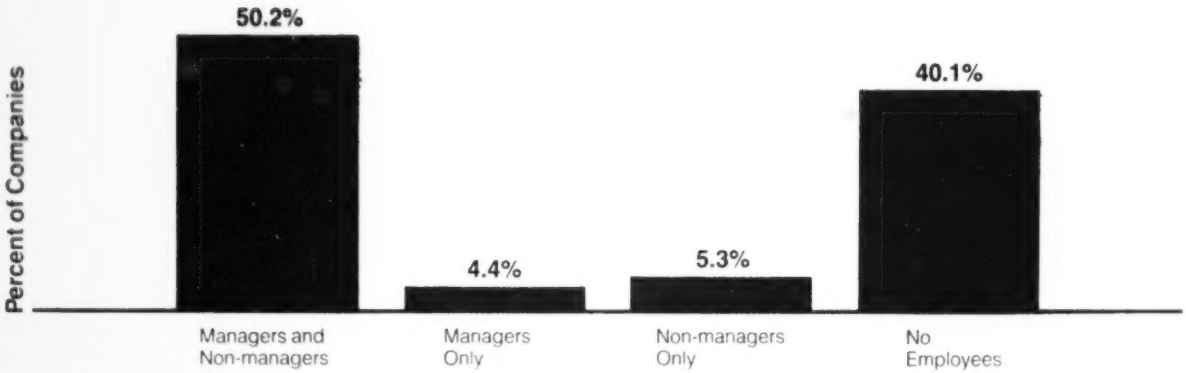
Part-time returns are not always easy to arrange.

A limited part-time return option, though rarely part of formal policy, is available in some form in many companies. Sixty percent of corporate respondents said that some employees had been allowed to return to work part time on a limited basis. Most of these

reported having allowed both managers and non-managers the option. At only a few companies were gradual returns restricted to either managers or non-managers.

COMPANIES ALLOWING SOME EMPLOYEES TO RETURN PART TIME FOR A LIMITED PERIOD

(N = 339)



Eligible Employees

© Catalyst 1986

Managers are allowed more generous terms than non-managers when returning part time. Managers can often retain their jobs, working on prorated salaries and receiving partial or full benefits. Sometimes a company will create new jobs by redefining managerial responsibilities so women can handle the work on a part-time schedule.

A common complaint among managers who had chosen part-time schedules was that heavy work loads and pressure from supervisors sometimes prevented them from following through on their choices. One manager who had arranged a three-day work week found the schedule impossible to maintain. "The company was going through an acquisition and there were unusual circumstances," she said. "The net result was that during my second week back, I ended up working until two o'clock in the morning, five days in a row. My part-time schedule was short-lived, to say the least."

The risk that a planned part-time schedule will collapse is much higher for a manager than for a non-manager. In most cases, part-time schedules were also easier for non-managers to arrange. The trade-off, however, was that non-managers returning part time frequently had to join their companies' in-house temporary pools or allow themselves to be placed in different jobs. This often meant a salary reduction and slowed career progress.

PART III: CORPORATE ATTITUDES AND EVOLVING POLICY

By researching current policies and practices Catalyst obtained a picture of the kinds of leaves that are currently being offered and taken. By probing corporate attitudes toward leaves and related policy options the study uncovered several barriers to policy development, and provided some insights into possible directions for the future.

WHAT DETERMINES A LEAVE'S SUCCESS

Companies and employees have different standards for evaluating the success of a leave. Employers' primary concerns are policy-related, having to do with how well policy is communicated and how equitably it is applied. Another major concern for employers has been getting leave-takers back to work as soon as possible. Employees, on the other hand, naturally view parental leave as a more personal issue. While companies' concerns are critical in designing leave policy, the concerns of employees are equally important.

CORPORATE PERSPECTIVES

When asked, "What was the most important factor in making the handling of parental leaves successful for your company?," 38.8% of corporate respondents cited either good communication about policy or clarity of policy, and another 29.1% cited fairness in administrating policy. Only 14.3% named attention to individual leave-takers' needs. The remaining 17.7% cited other factors, including having adequate means of handling a leave-taker's work, cooperation between supervisor and employee and being promptly informed of an employee's decision not to return to work (N=237). Good communication, clarity of policy and equity were the most important factors cited by corporate respondents for judging the success of a leave.

- **Clarity and communication**

  Employers cited the importance of communicating the details of leave policy, including benefits, compensation and job guarantees, to all employees. They believe that when employees understand policy well in advance of the actual leave, they will gain a clearer view of their entitlements and will have fewer unmet expectations. According to one human resources executive, "A successful leave depends upon broad, regular review of policy with the candidate well in advance of the anticipated commencement of the leave." Focus group participants also mentioned this sort of communication as the best way to avoid misunderstandings.

- **Equity**

  In naming equity as a factor crucial to successful leaves, companies voiced concerns about the fairness of their policies. One pertinent issue is ensuring that policy be applied equally to all new parent employees. Another is that parent employees do not receive benefits that are not provided to non-parent employees. Companies' concerns about equity may also be prompted by legal considerations, specifically by fears of violating the Pregnancy Discrimination Act.

- **Being informed about an employee's plans**

  Companies must plan for employees' leaves and for the period following. If a woman does not intend to return to work, the company must seek a replacement for her. It is therefore crucial for companies to know employees' intentions as early as possible.

One theme that emerged repeatedly in companies' comments on the survey and in interviews with human resources executives was the fear that employees would not return. The grounds for this concern are hard to pinpoint. One possible explanation may

be that employers who have had one or two bad experiences in this regard expect to be "burned"--they automatically assume that leave-takers will not return. The assumption that women do not return from parental leaves is not, in any case, based on observation of an actual trend. Companies do not appear to be tracking the precise number of women who fail to return to work.

EMPLOYEES' PERSPECTIVES

Understanding policy and being treated fairly were important to leave-takers, but the factors that were considered most crucial to the success of a leave were being able to return to work well rested, sufficient time to make the transition back to full-time work and reinstatement to the same job. Obtaining satisfactory child care was considered an essential factor by most employees.

- **Adequate leave time with job guarantee**

  Focus group participants mentioned the possibility of a job guarantee as a key factor in deciding what length leave to take. The prevailing tendency was for women to take as much time as they could and still be reinstated to their regular jobs. In many companies job guarantees applied only to the period of disability. As a result, large numbers of employees were forced to return to work before they were physically and emotionally ready. It took these women quite a while to be as productive as they had been before leaving. One focus group participant noted that returning to work early prolonged her readjustment period. "I found it hard to get back to functioning at my usual pace," she said, "because I was working a full day and getting up in the middle of the night to care for the baby." When asked from their dual perspectives as mothers and employees what length leave they would have liked and what length they would recommend for policy, focus group participants most frequently suggested a period of three months.

Broken into its components, a three-month leave would probably consist of a disability leave plus an additional month to a month and a half unpaid leave. Although every effort was made to encourage women to freely imagine ideal leave lengths, they rarely responded by choosing lengthy leaves.

The focus group finding of three months corroborates that of a poll conducted by Working Mother magazine in 1983. In that poll, which tabulated replies from over 2,000 working women, 45% of respondents felt that three months should be made the standard length of a paid maternity leave. Twenty-four percent said six weeks should be standard. These women, like those in Catalyst's focus group, were not requesting excessively long leaves.

o **Flexible return to work**

Although the women Catalyst spoke with do not demand extensive leaves, they do value the opportunity to make a gradual transition back to work through a limited part-time schedule. In virtually every focus group, women lamented the fact that they had no alternative to a full-time work schedule and expressed the wish that even a short period of part-time work were possible. Many found that serving as full-time mothers on Sunday and full-time employees on Monday was an abrupt and disruptive change. Others said that a limited part-time schedule would allow them to become comfortable with their child care arrangements so that, as one woman remarked, "I wouldn't feel like I was leaving my baby with a total stranger for an entire day." Several women who had been able to arrange part-time returns said the schedule gave them time to develop confidence in their ability to successfully juggle their dual roles.

- **Stable, quality child care**

  Women indicated that the most critical factor in being able to return to work and stay on the job is adequate child care. Employees are concerned about both the quality and the reliability of care.

  A management consultant who had had an excellent child care arrangement that fell through said, "The hardest thing is to go to work with doubts about what's happening at home. If your child care is good, you can be yourself. If it isn't, you can't function." Many women reported having difficulty locating and maintaining satisfactory child care. They also complained about the lack of support systems when an arrangement collapsed or a child became ill. These factors combined to make many employees continuously apprehensive about their return to work.

Other factors employees considered important to a successful leave were:

- **Income replacement during leaves**

  Disability at partial salary replacement and unpaid leave meant loss of income, which prevented some women from taking as much time as they needed emotionally and physically.

- **The attitudes of supervisors and coworkers**

  Employees made easier transitions back to work when their supervisors and coworkers were supportive of their return. For supervisors this meant not begrudging the employee's absence and understanding her need to maintain a standard schedule. The resentment of coworkers who had been given the responsibility for leave-takers' work was also problematic.

- **Work load on return**

  Focus group participants expressed an almost unanimous desire to return to a manageable, reasonable work load. Several had returned to their jobs to find that

work had accumulated while they were out. Instead of being asked to gradually catch up, many women felt that they were expected to make the work load disappear overnight.

RECONCILING THE TWO PERSPECTIVES

The challenge for policy planners and implementers is to design a policy that is clear, specific and well-defined, but provides the flexibility to address individual employees' needs.

WHAT COMPANIES CONSIDER A REASONABLE LEAVE LENGTH

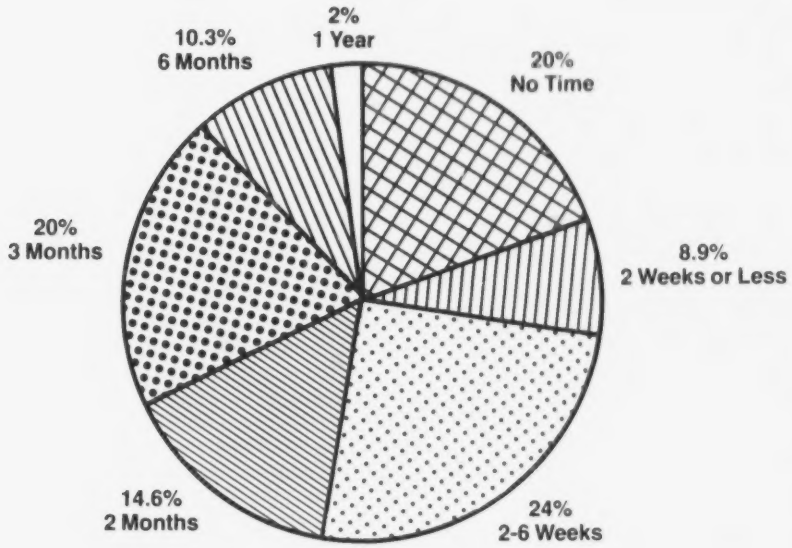
An indication of possible future policy trends may be found in corporate attitudes toward the length of unpaid leaves. To learn more about this aspect of parental leave, Catalyst asked human resources executives how long an unpaid leave is considered reasonable, irrespective of what may be stated in official policy. Additionally, for companies with an unpaid leave policy, the lengths of leave offered were compared with those considered reasonable.

More respondents considered it reasonable for women to take unpaid leaves than actually included such a practice in written policy.

Although just over half of responding companies now include unpaid leave in their parental leave policies, fully 80% of respondents considered it reasonable for women to take some time off beyond disability. The amount of time that was considered reasonable varied. A few (2%) put it at one year, but the majority of answers fell in the range between two weeks and three months.

AMOUNT OF UNPAID LEAVE TIME RESPONDENTS CONSIDERED REASONABLE FOR WOMEN, REGARDLESS OF OFFICIAL POLICY

(N = 349)

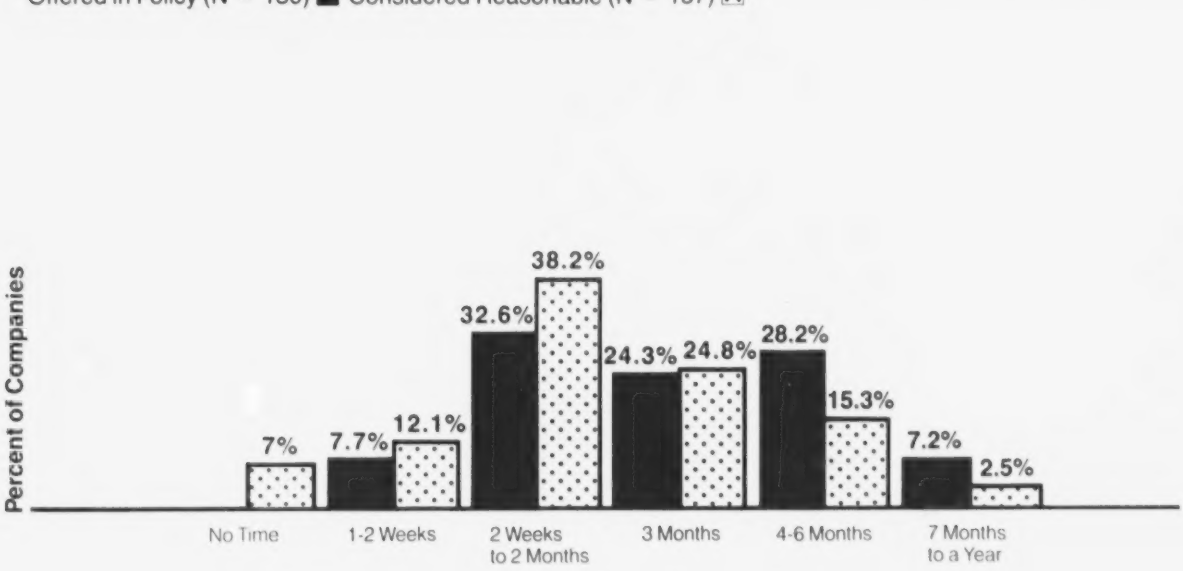


© Catalyst 1986

One possible explanation for the difference between policy and attitude may be that companies want to have some say in which employees are granted leaves. By not including unpaid leave in policy and thus making it available to everyone, employers can use such leaves to reward valued employees. The reverse may be true as well; not including unpaid leave in policy can be a way of encouraging unsatisfactory employees not to return. Providing unpaid leaves to natural mothers might also legally obligate a company to offer leaves to natural fathers and adoptive parents as well, a step that many companies may not be ready to take.

Corporations sanction slightly less unpaid leave for women than is offered in policy. Although 28.2% of companies offered women unpaid leaves of 4-6 months, only 15.3% considered it reasonable for them to take that much time off. In addition, 7% of companies that had unpaid leave policies did not sanction their use.

COMPARISON OF POLICY AND ATTITUDE FOR COMPANIES WITH AN UNPAID LEAVE POLICY FOR WOMEN

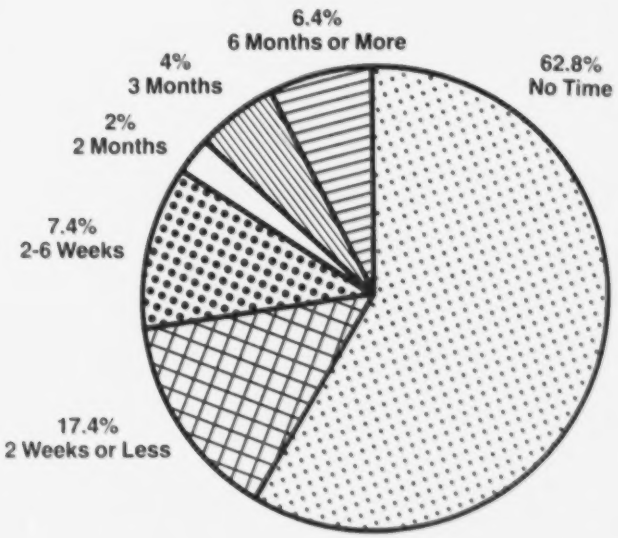


© Catalyst 1986

Leaves for men are less likely to be officially sanctioned than leaves for women. Corporations take a far more negative view of unpaid leaves for men than they do unpaid leaves for women. Almost two-thirds of total respondents did not consider it reasonable for men to take any parental leave whatsoever. Another quarter of respondents thought it reasonable for men to take six weeks' leave or less.

AMOUNT OF UNPAID LEAVE TIME RESPONDENTS CONSIDERED REASONABLE FOR MEN, REGARDLESS OF OFFICIAL POLICY

(N = 298)

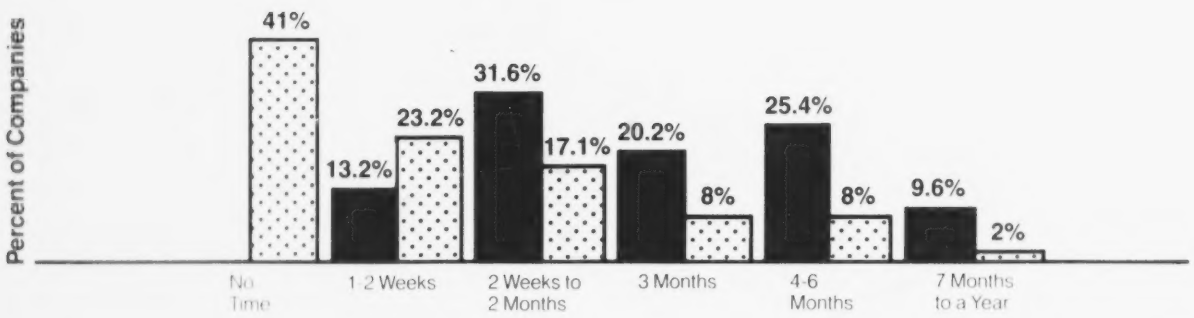


Catalyst 1986

Even among companies that currently offer unpaid leaves to men, many thought it unreasonable for men to take them. Fully 41% of companies with unpaid leave policies for men did not sanction their using the policy, and only 18% of respondents considered it reasonable for men to take leaves of three months or longer. These results may explain at least in part why men are not taking advantage of the leaves that policies offer.

COMPARISON OF POLICY AND ATTITUDE FOR COMPANIES WITH AN UNPAID LEAVE POLICY FOR MEN

Offered in Policy (N = 114) ■ Considered Reasonable (N = 99) ⁘



Length of Leave

© Catalyst 1986

Management sends subtle messages to employees about what the corporate culture really sanctions.

Interviews with human resources executives and discussions with focus groups revealed some of the ways employees find out what the corporate culture sanctions as opposed to what policy offers. One lower-level manager who wished to take unpaid leave was told, "That policy was designed for secretaries, not for professional employees." Another woman studied the situation on her own. "If you want to take three months off and get back into the same area," she concluded, "you're taking a risk." In still another example

of underlying messages, a management consultant reported that although other women in her company had arranged part-time schedules, she was reluctant to ask for one because she surmised that her request would have had "negative connotations."

Companies in the West were more likely to consider it reasonable for women to take longer leaves than companies in other regions.

AMOUNT OF LEAVE TIME CONSIDERED REASONABLE FOR WOMEN BY REGION*

	Northeast (N=112)	Midwest (N=124)	South (N=54)	West (N=50)
No time	21%	22%	23%	6%
2-6 weeks	26%	39%	33%	36%
2-3 months	35%	30%	33%	46%
6 or more months	18%	9%	11%	12%

*Numbers have been rounded to the nearest percent.

Larger companies as measured by size of work force were more likely to sanction longer leaves for women than medium-sized and smaller companies.

Fully 42.5% of larger companies consider a two- to three-month leave reasonable, while only 28.2% and 34.2% of medium-sized and smaller companies, respectively, feel the same way. One reason for this variation may be that a company with a larger work force is better able to reallocate personnel during leave periods.

AMOUNT OF LEAVE TIME CONSIDERED REASONABLE FOR WOMEN
BY SIZE OF WORK FORCE*

	Larger (N=106)	Medium (N=117)	Smaller (N=120)
No time	16%	21.4%	20.8%
2-6 weeks	24.5%	39.3%	35%
2-3 months	42.5%	28.2%	34.2%
6 months or more	17%	11.1%	10%

*Larger work force = 9,500 or more employees; medium work force = 2500-9500 employees; smaller work force = 2,500 or fewer employees.

Higher sales companies were more likely to be amenable to leave time for men than medium and lower sales companies.

AMOUNT OF LEAVE TIME CONSIDERED REASONABLE FOR MEN
BY LEVEL OF ANNUAL SALES*+

	Higher (N=76)	Medium (N=112)	Lower (N=81)
No time	50%	66%	68%
2-6 weeks	30%	22%	28%
2-3 months	10%	6%	2%
6 months or more	10%	6%	2%

*Higher sales = $2 billion or more; medium sales = $501 million-$2 billion; lower sales = $500 million or less.
+Numbers have been rounded to the nearest percent.

FUTURE POLICY DIRECTIONS

To gain some sense of future policy directions, the Catalyst survey queried companies about their attitudes toward a variety of policy options. Respondents were asked to imagine themselves a company's director of human resources, in the process of writing an official parental leave policy. They were then asked which of a number of policy components they would be willing to consider. Their responses provided a perspective on their priorities.

The options to which human resources policy planners were most receptive included: disability policies, three to six months' unpaid leave for women, part-time return for women and two weeks' unpaid leave for men. The least popular options were paid leave time and extended leaves for either female or male employees. The options chosen are consistent with the direction in which large companies seem to be moving.

COMPARISON OF FUTURE POLICY DIRECTIONS AND CURRENT POLICY OPTIONS

Policy Option	Number of Respondents Open To Option	Number of Companies Currently Offering Option
Short-term disability policy with a job guarantee	317	281
Unpaid leave (beyond disability) of 3-6 Months for new mothers	253	95
Return to a part-time schedule for a limited time period for new mothers	226	203**
Two weeks unpaid parental leave beyond vacations for new fathers	193	15
An eligibility requirement for leave of 2-12 months employment for all employees	147	N/A*
Flexibility in the work schedules of new parents	133	N/A*

Shared parental leaves for spouses who work for the same company	122	N/A*
Part-time work for a limited period for new fathers	109	N/A*
A limited period of working at home allowed to women after leaves end	87	N/A*
Unpaid leave of 1-6 months for new fathers	83	88
An eligibility requirement for leave of 13-24 months employment for all employees	83	N/A*
One to two weeks paid leave other than vacation for new fathers	45	4
Some paid leave beyond disability for new mothers	36	25
Unpaid leave (beyond disability) of 6-12 months for new mothers	32	12

*Comparable figures are not available.
** Currently offered on an informal basis, not as a regular policy feature.

The preferred policy options of human resources professionals were fairly consistent based on industry group, level of annual sales, size of work force and region.

Policy planners at service and financial companies were generally more interested in innovative options than policy planners at other kinds of companies.

PREFERRED POLICY OPTIONS BY INDUSTRY GROUP

	Manufacturing/ Construction (N=218)	Service/ Financial (N=114)	Transportation/ Communication (N=43)
Unpaid leave of three to six months for new mothers	64.7%	73.7%	60.5%
Part-time schedule on a limited basis for new mothers	59.2%	64%	48.8%
Work at home on a limited basis for new mothers	21.1%	28.9%	13.9%
Shared leave time if husband and wife work at same company	30.3%	38.6%	23.3%
Policy of flexibility in work schedules for all employees	33.9%	39.5%	25.6%

Policy planners at companies with lower levels of annual sales were less willing to consider extended leaves of one to six months for men than they were to consider two weeks' unpaid leave.

In companies with higher annual sales, the differential was much smaller. Lower sales companies were also more interested than those with higher sales in creating eligibility requirements for parental leaves.

PREFERRED POLICY OPTIONS BY LEVEL OF ANNUAL SALES*

	Higher (N=98)	Medium (N=135)	Lower (N=104)
Two weeks' unpaid leave for new fathers	40.8%	50.4%	56.7%
One to six months' unpaid leave for new fathers	34.7%	25.9%	9.6%
A 2-12 month eligibility requirement for leave for all employees	32.7%	39.3%	44.2%

* Higher sales = $2 billion or more; medium sales = $501 million-$2 billion; lower sales = $500 million or less.

At companies with smaller employee populations, policy planners are less willing to consider longer unpaid leaves for men.

If the size of work force rather than level of annual sales is used to measure the size of a company, findings corroborate the fact that smaller companies are less amenable to longer unpaid leaves for men.

PREFERRED POLICY OPTIONS BY SIZE OF WORK FORCE*+

	Larger (N=121)	Medium (N=124)	Smaller (N=133)
Two weeks' unpaid leave for new fathers	43%	46%	63%
One to six months' unpaid leave for new fathers	31%	20%	14%
A 2-12 month eligibility requirement	30%	39%	47%

* Larger work force = 9,500 or more employees; medium work force = 2,500-9,500 employees; smaller work force = 2,500 or fewer employees.
+ Numbers have been rounded to the nearest percents.

Limited part-time schedules and working at home were favored less often by Southern policymakers than by those in other regions.

PREFERRED POLICY OPTIONS BY REGION*

	Northeast (N=123)	Midwest (N=138)	South (N=58)	West (N=54)
Limited part-time returns for new mothers	65%	58%	48%	57%
Work at home for a limited period for new mothers	30%	23%	10%	17%

*Numbers have been rounded to the nearest percent.

Female respondents were somewhat more receptive to new policy options than male respondents.

A test for the correlation between gender of respondent and response was minor. While such differences were small, they were nevertheless consistent. Female respondents tended to be more willing to consider innovative policy components than male respondents.

PREFERRED POLICY OPTIONS BY GENDER OF RESPONDENT*

	Female (N=160)	Male (N=173)
Part-time schedule on a limited basis for new mothers	67%	54%
Part-time work on limited basis for new fathers	34%	23%
Two weeks' unpaid leave for new fathers	56%	46%

*Numbers have been rounded to the nearest percent.

Human resources executives were most concerned about handling the work of absent employees, losing employees due to inadequate company policies and the equity of granting leaves to new parents and not to other employees.

When asked which components of a parental leave policy they would be willing to consider, most responding human resources executives listed more options than their companies currently offered. Respondents were then asked to name three chief concerns in considering policy options. Their responses point up some of the issues that militate against the implementation of new policy.

The three most common concerns were handling the leave-taker's work (308 companies), losing valuable employees if the company does not meet the needs of a changing work force (238 companies) and the equity of granting leaves to new parents but not to other employees (205 companies). Concerns of lesser importance were obtaining high productivity in departments where employees work on part-time schedules, the possibility that employees will not return after leaves and containing the cost of parental benefits.

Considering the most frequently cited concern--handling work--it is hardly surprising that leaves of 6-12 months for women and 1-6 months for men were unpopular options. On the other hand, the long-term productivity issue (loss of valuable employees) may explain companies' receptivity to flexible returns and granting sufficient leave time. Finally, employers' disinterest in paid leaves for parents may be tied to concerns over equity or the cost of such leaves.

BARRIERS TO POLICY DEVELOPMENT

In considering policy changes, human resources planners are torn between two opposing forces. One is the changing nature of the work force and the resultant demand for policy that is geared to employee needs. The other is concern over the rise in costs and the loss in short-term productivity that can result from increased leave-taking.

In recent years, working parents have changed in their perceptions of themselves and their ability to manage work and family. The time when they felt obliged to shoulder their responsibilites with a minimum of outside help has passed. Working parents now realize that fulfilling their responsibilities as workers or as parents is unlikely without some type of societal supports. Because perceived needs have changed, working parents--particularly women--are now more likely to assess employer attitudes and to scrutinize benefits packages.

Meanwhile, companies are discovering that meeting the needs of today's working parents can conflict with such corporate concerns as maintaining short-term productivity

and containing costs. Future policy changes will depend on the outcome of this tug-of-war between two divergent constituencies.

Lack of data on leave-taking is a handicap in changing policy.

Concerns over the loss in short-term productivity and the handling of work during unpaid leaves were mentioned not only in the survey but in focus group discussion and interviews with human resources executives. Despite their anxieties, most companies are monitoring neither the number of employees taking leaves nor the number not returning from leaves. One hundred thirty companies, or 33.8% of all respondents, indicated that data was unavailable regarding the number of managerial women who took leaves in their companies during the previous year. Another 91 companies (23.7%) did not respond to the question. Figures on non-managerial women were equally hard to come by. In addition, large numbers of companies had no figures on leave-takers who did not return; 103 companies (26.8%) said they did not know and 110 companies (28.6%) did not respond. Interviews with human resources executives revealed that they did not keep such statistics.

Companies often justified or seemed proud of, their lack of statistics, asserting that their nonexistence proved management did not discriminate. Noting which disabilities were awarded for pregnancy, they claimed, might leave them open to charges of sex bias. While corporate concern regarding discrimination may be well founded, lack of data on leave-taking is a severe handicap in evaluating and modifying policy based on current experience and expressed needs. To get a true picture of the impact of leaves on handling work, companies need to know how many employees are taking leaves and the lengths of the leaves they are taking. Determining how the retention of employees is affected by parental leave policy and whether or not policy is adequate is possible only if companies collect data on leave-takers who do not return and on those who depart permanently within a year after returning.

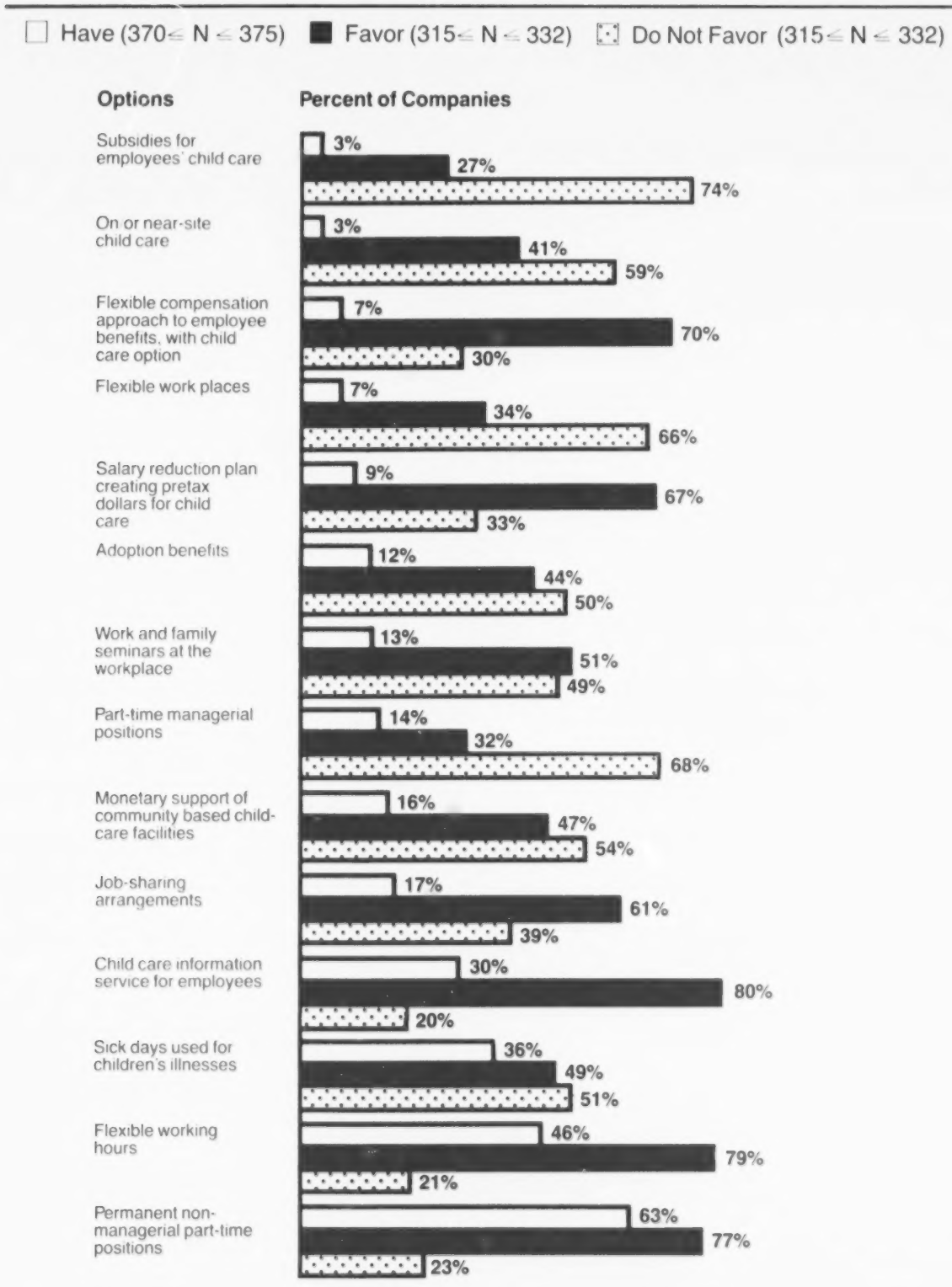
WORK AND FAMILY INITIATIVES

Parental leave must be considered in the context of other work and family supports. Parental leave policy provides an important clue as to a company's attitude toward work and family needs. It gives employees a sense of whether or not the company is supportive of new parents and whether this is a place where women can successfully combine careers and family. Working parents feel a strong need for societal supports, a need which thus far has not been met. The lag has occurred partly because of a piecemeal approach to policy-making. Companies have tried to address one or two problems, but have failed to evolve a comprehensive plan that would meet the needs of this new, and by no means insignificant, segment of the work force.

To learn the level of corporate awareness about work and family initiatives, we asked companies which of a variety of options they now offer and which they would favor implementing. Very few initiatives were offered by vast numbers of companies. Among those that were offered, the most popular included part-time non-managerial positions, flexible work schedules and allowing personal sick days to be used when a child is sick. Among options directly related to child care needs, child care information services and monetary support of community-based child care were considerably more popular than subsidies for employees' child care and on- or near-site child care. Concern over equity may explain these preferences. Direct subsidies for child care and on- or near-site day care could be considered special benefits, since non-parents are obviously excluded. Moreover, on- or near-site day care entails a substantial start-up cost and company involvement.

The work and family initiatives most often favored by companies were child care information services, flexible benefits with a dependent care option, salary reduction plans with a dependent care option, permanent non-managerial part-time positions, job

WORK AND FAMILY INITIATIVES: PRACTICES AND ATTITUDES*



© Catalyst 1986

*Numbers have been rounded to the nearest percent.

sharing and flexible work hours. The options which responding companies favored least were subsidies for employees' child care, part-time managerial positions and flexible workplaces.

Since Catalyst's survey was conducted, more companies have developed work and family initiatives, but the number is still low. The fact remains that a considerable lag exists between the changing needs of the work force and the development of supports to meet those needs.

Variations were seen by industry, level of annual sales and region.

In comparing various kinds of companies it is important to note that the numbers discussed were often small; inferences must therefore be considered tentative.

COMPARISON OF WORK AND FAMILY INITIATIVES BY INDUSTRY GROUP*

	Manufacturing/ Construction (211≤N≤213)	**Service/ Financial** (110≤N≤112)	**Transportation/ Communication** (40≤N≤42)
Monetary support of community child care	19%	13%	5%
Sick days for children's illnesses	34%	44%	28%
Part-time managerial positions	7%	27%	12%
Part-time non-managerial positions	55%	85%	48%
Flexible work schedules	38%	57%	64%

* Numbers have been rounded to the nearest percent.

Companies with higher levels of annual sales offer substantially more extensive work and family initiatives.

COMPARISON OF WORK AND FAMILY INITIATIVES BY LEVEL OF ANNUAL SALES*†

	Higher (97≤N≤98)	Medium (128≤N≤130)	Lower (101≤N≤103)
Child care information service	40%	30%	20%
Work and family seminars	23%	9%	6%
Part-time managerial positions	27%	9%	6%
Part-time non-managerial positions	71%	64%	49%
Flexible work schedules	55%	44%	35%

*Higher sales = $2 billion or more; medium sales = $501 million-$2 billion; lower sales = $500 million or less.
†Numbers have been rounded to the nearest percent.

Regional differences were evident in the types of initiatives offered.

Companies in the West and South led in allowing employees to use sick days to care for children who are ill. Western companies were also much more likely to offer flexible work schedules.

Companies in the Northeast were most likely to give monetary support to community child care and to offer child care information services.

COMPARISON OF WORK AND FAMILY INITIATIVES BY REGION*

	Northeast (117≤N≤121)	Midwest (133≤N≤135)	South (55≤N≤57)	West (51≤ N≤53)
Monetary support of community child care	23%	13%	13%	6%
Child care information service	43%	27%	16%	20%
Sick days for children's illnesses	30%	37%	46%	45%
Flexible work schedules	40%	45%	47%	60%

* Numbers have been rounded to the nearest percent.

Women favor work and family initiatives more frequently than men.

The respondent's gender substantially influenced his or her attitude toward work and family policies. The most likely explanation for this difference may be that women still find themselves in the position of managing families as well as jobs, and are consequently more sensitive to the need for societal supports.

COMPARISON OF WORK AND FAMILY INITIATIVES
BY GENDER OF RESPONDENT

	Female (124≤N≤135)	Male (146≤N 158)
Subsidies for employees' child care	38.5%	19.0%
Work and family seminars at the workplace	61.2%	43.2%
Flexible compensation approach to employee benefits, with child care option	81.0%	64.0%
Adoption benefits	55.0%	39.0%
Part-time managerial positions	40.9%	28.1%
Permanent non-managerial part-time positions	88.3%	72.0%
Flexible workplaces	40.3%	29.6%

PART IV: CATALYST'S POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on conclusions drawn from this research, Catalyst recommends the following policy components:

- o Disability leave with full or partial salary reimbursement
- o Additional unpaid parental leave of one to three months
- o A transition period of part-time work for one month to one year for returning leave-takers
- o Reinstatement to the same or comparable job at all stages of the leave

A parental leave policy should be explicitly communicated in writing, clearly identifiable and distributed to all employees.

These recommendations enable an employer to strike an effective balance between the priorities of a company and those of its employees. From the company's standpoint, the total policy is adequate but not excessive, particularly when a part-time transition period is utilized as an alternative to a lengthier (six months or more) unpaid leave.

From the employer's perspective, the policy takes the leave-taker's career commitment seriously. It allows a reasonable amount of time for physical recovery and adjustment to a new role, but does not encourage a leave length that works against employees' professional goals.

Catalyst
250 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 10003
(212) 777-8900